

“An Invitation to Prayer”

Psalm 34:4-8; Psalm 63:1-8 (NRSV)

This week, we begin a six-week series on prayer: A life of Prayer. Why do we pray? What is prayer? Does God answer our prayers? We'll consider these questions and more as we seek to make prayer a priority in our living.

Why pray?

Why pray? The reason is simple. We pray because our heart seeks its true home and its true home is the heart of God.¹ God longs for our presence. After Adam and Eve made their fateful decision to turn away from God, God came to the garden, calling for Adam, seeking him. In much the same way, God invites each of us to come to him, to come home, to return to the way of life for which we were made. Our hearts hear God's call, but we have turned so far away from God that the call is somehow muffled. It is a little like hearing a phone ring, but being unsure where the ring is coming from, much less who is on the other end of the line. We might search all over the house and yet never look in the right place.

A September 7, 2003, *New York Times* article, “The Futile Pursuit of Happiness”² tells of researchers whose studies have concluded that we think we know what will make us happy – but we do not. This was one of the 10 most e-mailed articles on the *Times* website in all of 2003! I am sure that people were drawn to the article because it speaks to the human condition. We have restless, yearning hearts that seek peace and joy. We spend much of our life looking one place after another for something that will make us happy or joyful or content. But, in truth, our restless hearts will only find their rest in God.

Coming home

Writing thousands of years ago, the psalmists expressed our hearts' seeking after God, “O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you. . . My soul clings to you...happy are those who take refuge in him...in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy” (from today's psalms). The heart of the psalmists' prayer, indeed all prayer, is a loving relationship...between God and me...between God and you...between God and all those who seek their “heart's true home.”

Richard Foster uses familiar, yet powerful, imagery to describe this home.

We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of his heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of his friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the study of his wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch . . . and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of his creativity . . . he invites us into the bedroom of his rest . . . where we are known and are known to the fullest... The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer.”³

A Call to Prayer 2020

Rev. David Woody is issuing a call to prayer, urging us all to make prayer a priority in our living during this difficult season in our world. This will not happen overnight. Even mature Christians will acknowledge the considerable challenges in building a life of prayer. Nonetheless, we, as a church family, begin here. We begin now.

During this series, the text boxes in these studies will be devoted to classic prayers that have been written over the last two thousand years! One way we learn to pray is by praying prayers written by others. Indeed, this practice can help to ensure that our own prayers do not become too “me focused.”

I suggest that you try finding a quiet place and reading these prayers aloud, allowing your heart to join with the heart of the prayer's writer. We are a community of faith that encompasses not only Christians living now, but all the Christians who have come before us. Hear the prayers of fellow Christians who have sought to open their hearts to God.

¹ This beautiful phrase, “the heart's true home,” is from Richard Foster's book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. This book is a touching and challenging presentation of prayer and is my book recommendation for July.

² The article is by Jon Gertner and was in the *NY Times* on September 7, 2003. It is available at the *Times* website—for a small fee.

³ from the introduction to Foster's book, *Prayer*, p. 1-2.

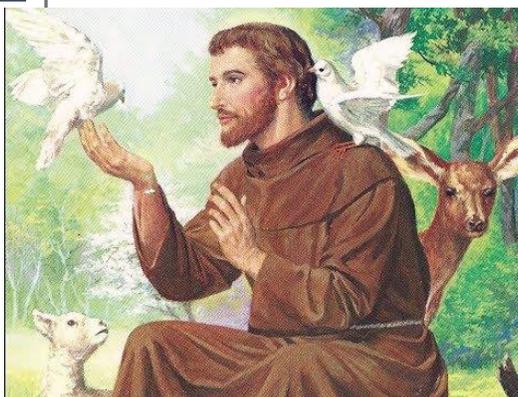
The Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
 Where there is injury, pardon;
 Where there is error, truth;
 Where there is doubt, faith;
 Where there is despair, hope;
 Where there is darkness, light;
 And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
 seek to be consoled, as to console;
 To be understood, as to understand;
 To be loved, as to love.
 For it is in giving that we receive,
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

This well-known prayer first appeared about a century ago. Though it was certainly not written by St. Francis of Assisi, it has long been associated with him and reflects well the simple faith and life to which Francis called the people of his day and our own.

You may not be in the habit of using the Daily Bible Readings at the end of these studies, but I urge you to make time this week. Each daily reading this week is a psalm, for there is no



better place than the Psalter to begin our journey toward a life of prayer.

Over the centuries, most Christians have learned

to pray by praying the psalms. You might find it easier to see the psalms as prayers, even to pray them yourself, if you read them in a paraphrase such as Eugene Peterson's *The Message*. He has scrubbed away some of the polish and politeness that characterizes translations like the New Revised Standard Version, enabling us to feel the emotion and the honesty of the psalmists. There is nothing "fancy" about the Hebrew language of the psalms and there need be nothing "fancy" about the language of our prayers. There is no secret to prayer; there is no insider vocabulary. We do not have to dress up our words. All God asks is that we be honest with him, as honest as we possibly can be. We ask no less of every important relationship we have in life.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday	Psalm 16	"You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy."
Tuesday	Psalm 23	"I will dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long."
Wednesday	Psalm 91	"My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
Thursday	Psalm 128	"Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways."
Friday	Psalm 107	"Consider the steadfast love of the LORD."
Saturday	Psalm 51	"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me"