

**LEARNING TO PRAY
OUTLINE/GUIDE**



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Learning to pray

Session 1- Opening Prayer

Introduction - everyone

Our purpose: to learn how to pray and have a conversation with God so you can come to better know God. Prayer is one of the God given ways of building and deepening our relationship with God. Your intention is as important as what you actually accomplish. Learning to pray is about taking the journey it is not about achieving a goal or arriving.

Two pieces of business

- Do we all agree to abide by a covenant of confidentiality?
- And can we all practice Holy Listening?

That means letting the other person finish their thoughts. It means resisting any temptation to break in while someone is talking. It encourages us to be silent and open ourselves to what the other person is saying before we do anything. Finally, it means being careful about what you will say so you do not insult or hurt anyone.

Personal Introductions - 1 minute each

First, say your name and church affiliation.

Then tell us "What was your first experience of prayer?"

Outline of what you will learn.

Ways to read Scripture:

- Reception Theory
- Lectio Divina

Ways to pray: ps: there is no wrong way! And there will be no grades!

Our desire to be with and communicate with God is a strong beginning. Be gentle with yourself. Don't demand perfection. Just ease into this process and the rest will come over time. If you don't pray every day forgive yourself and move on. It is all part of the process. It is like learning to ride a bike, you fall occasionally. You are a little wobbly for a while but after practice, it becomes easy and natural. So set yourself free to follow your path to Learning to Pray.

Why journal and how?

It is your record of your time with God. How much you do is up to you. It is a memory of your journey to getting to know God.

Various techniques:

- full sentences/paragraphs
- a note to yourself
- poetry
- visual - painting/sketching/collage
- Ask yourself what questions came up?
- How did I feel?
- Were there any insights?

Examen

Why review your day and your interaction with God?

- where/when did you feel close to God?
- where/when did you feel distant from God?

This prayer at the end of the day will help you become more aware of God in your daily life.

Further suggestions for the Examen

- Remind yourself:
 - know God is here
 - give thanks for God's presence
- In my day today, when did I feel God's presence? or When did I miss God's presence?
- My prayer for one or more of those times (Help! and/or Thanks!)
- I ask for awareness of God's presence in my day tomorrow.

The Learning to Pray process:

- *Open each session with prayer*

What do I bring to my prayer time today?

Ask God to give you what you need today.

Tell God what you desire to do for God this day.

- *Read Scripture for the day*
- *Pray*

What did your prayer time reveal to you?

- *Journal*
Write your feelings during the experience
- *Examen*

At the end of the day review your day within God

A guided meditation

Our Next Session

- We will practice together using the process
- Break up into our small groups.

Answer any questions or concerns

Preparation for our next meeting:

Getting Ready for Session Two: The Process of Learning to Pray

Each day this week read and spend some time with **Mathew 6:11**. (*Feel free to read the text before and/or after the suggested verse.*)

There are no "rules" to reading the Bible or praying to God. Just do your best and let go of any internal pressure to be perfect. As you move through this week with this passage, reflect on the ways you approach reading the Bible and Praying. Possibly jot your thoughts and feelings down each day. Don't be afraid to be frustrated. This is new, and it takes time to adapt.

Your group facilitator will begin the session next week by sharing their week of prayer with you and then invite you to share as well. Often we find power and growth in the spiritual journey of others. We look forward to hearing about your journey.

Small groups announced

Closing prayer

In small groups

Opening prayer

Meditation

Review of our prayer week with Matthew 6:11

Session 2 - How do we go about the process of learning to pray

In this session your leadership will talk about their journey, challenges and frustrations while Learning to Pray and the various tools we use or don't use. Below are some suggestions on how to proceed. Most of all be gentle with yourselves. Remember you are learning new things and that means change. It takes time, practice and making changes. Be gentle with yourself.

Suggested process

1. *Get comfortable in a room/place that will become your prayer space*
 - Comfortable chair
 - Use Icons/crosses or anything that might remind you of God
 - Use music if it is not too distracting
 - Taize Chants
 - Gregorian Chants
 - Ambrosian Chants
 - New Age background music or sounds
 - Sounds of rain, thunder the shore etc.
2. *What do I bring to my prayer time today?*
 - Ask God to give you what you need today.
 - Tell God what you desire to do for God this day.

3. *Read Scripture for the day*

How is the scripture coming to you?

How is God speaking to you or informing you about your life? Or is God not speaking to you in this scripture - that is okay.

Can you identify why you are not hearing God

- Distractions?
- Scripture brings up bad memories
- Other issues

4. *Pray*

- Get comfortable and go into quiet
- Try 5 minutes initially and over time you may work up to 15-20 minutes
- Just let it happen. Don't force it.
- If you are distracted use can use a mantra or sacred word to refocus you
- It is a learning process. It is like learning to ride a bike. You will fall many times before it becomes more natural.

At the end of your time with God ask -

- What did your prayer time reveal to you?
- What were your struggles and distractions?
- Identify the times when you felt close to God and when you felt far from God.

- Are there any underlying issues or tensions that are raising barriers to your communications with God?

5. *Journal*

- Write about your feelings during the experience
 - Have fun
- Be creative
 - Write down your experiences using word, sentence, poetry
 - Whatever works for you

Or

- Doodle
- Draw
- Do a collage
 - The journal is for you so you can over time look back and see your movement with God
 - Or use Music
 - Musica divina
 - Writing a song
 - Writing a mantra
 - Singing the scripture as your voice directs
 - Dancing or gesturing during prayer
 - Adding a verse to a familiar hymn as your journaling

6. *Examen*

At the end of the day review your day with God:

- Identify the high points; the low points; times when you felt close to God or God acting in your life as well as the times when you felt far from God

Review of the day

Questions and answers

Closing prayer

Session 3 - Who am I?

"We are not what we do, we are not what we have, we are not what others think of us. Coming home is claiming the truth. I am the beloved child of a loving creator." Henri J.M. Nouwen

In this session/week, we will explore who we are to God. Our identity is formed throughout life by our families, our friends, our hobbies and our pursuits in life - career/volunteer roles, family life. As Henri Nouwen points out, our identity can be formed by our possessions, our 401K, others' opinion of us. We will explore five Scriptures that describe who we are.

This exploration may elicit a range of feelings. You may feel that you are a beloved child of God. You may also feel unworthy or unlovable at times, due to life's many bumps and bruises.

For most of us, we regularly travel through these and other feelings about our self and our relationship with God. The hope for this week is that you will go through a host of understandings about yourself and your relationship with God, while moving toward a better understanding of yourself as a beloved child of God.

1- Jeremiah 31:3

"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

- What does it mean to you for God's love for you to be everlasting?
- We often think of being faithful to God or having faith in God. What does it mean to you that God is faithful to us?
- Does this remind you of anyone in your life? Many of us grew up with this scripture sung as a hymn. Listen to it on youtube and see how this scripture speaks to you through song. <https://youtu.be/wkMBSchV0Hc>

2- 1 John 3:1

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

- In our liturgy, we pray to God, Father and Mother of us all. How does thinking of God as a parent enrich your view of God?
- Does this present you with any limitations or barriers?
- If you are a parent, how has becoming a parent changed or enriched your relationship with God?
- In what ways do you feel God has lavished love on you? Or does this feel like a foreign concept?

3- Romans 8:38-39

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When I pray with this scripture, I like to insert my own barriers. "Neither to-do lists, nor cranky kids, nor mood swings, nor personal failings can separate us from the love of God." What is on your list? This is always a great place to ask God for help.

4- Genesis 1:26, 31

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ...God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

We are made in God's image, but much of religion has focused on the "likeness" part of this, becoming more like Christ. How does it feel to think of yourself as being made in God's image?

While many of us can identify ways we would like to be more like Christ, think back over your life and think of ways that you have already become more like Christ?

5- Colossians 3:1-3

"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

"The true human identity must build on this foundational goodness, a true identity 'hidden in the love and mercy of God,' as Thomas Merton once put it."

What parts of yourself or your identity have become clearer to you as you grow in your walk/journey with God? What does it mean to you to be "hidden with Christ in God"? (It's OK if your answer is "I have no earthly idea.")

Supplemental reflections for this week:

The Judeo-Christian creation story says that we were created in the very "image and likeness" of God: "Let us create humanity in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves" (Genesis 1:26).

The true human identity must build on this foundational goodness, a true identity "hidden in the love and mercy of God," as Thomas Merton once put it. [1] "Image" is our objective identity as children of God and "likeness" is our degree of personal appropriation of that very identity. We need both, although many Christians were not told about the first and gave exclusive emphasis to the second. Largely ineffective moralism has thus dominated most organized religion – without any grounding or power from core identity.

To become who we were created to be, we must each get our own "who" right! Who am I? Where do I objectively abide? Where do I come from? Is my DNA divine or not?

The great illusion that we must all overcome is that of separateness.

Religion's primary task is to communicate union, to reconnect people to their original identity "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

Throughout much of the Bible "sin" is perceived as an objective state and "sinners" as a class of people. God's clear and specific job description is to undo separation: "My dear people, we are already the children of God; it is only what is in the future that has not yet been revealed, and then all we know is that we shall be like God" (1 John 3:2). Jesus is The Great Reconnector – by modeling his own objective connection with God and telling us to do the same.

The word "sin" as we now use it is very problematic. It shames, but it does not enlighten or invite, which means it does not really help or change people except perhaps at the level of conformity. Most of us associate "sin" with personal naughty behaviors and individual moral unworthiness (i.e., as a personal fault more than a foundational illusion). I am not denying that if you have the foundational illusion, you will certainly operate in a very selfish and sinful way – because that small self is now all that you have!

What most people call "sin" is more the symptom of sin, not the delusional state itself! It is this common state of believed or chosen autonomy from God and others that must be addressed. Our primary and self-

destructive illusion is that we are separate and alone. This is the true basis, motivation, and loneliness that leads to all "sin". - Richard Rohr, from Daily Meditations, www.cac.org

"Your true identity is as a child of God. This is the identity you have to accept. Once you have claimed it and settled in it, you can live in a world that gives you much joy as well as pain. You can receive the praise as well as the blame that comes to you as an opportunity for strengthening your basic identity, because the identity that makes you free is anchored beyond all human praise and blame. You belong to God, and it is as a child of God that you are sent into the world." Henri Nouwen

Session 4 - Who is God?

We can never fully know God, who is far beyond human abilities of comprehension. But God wants to be known by us, even if imperfectly.

Prayer is a personal relationship with God. You are not relating to a far-off, abstract, intangible God who has little interest in the world and even less in your daily life. You are relating to a God who cares about you intensely and whom you can come to know personally.

In the Bible passages assigned for this week, you will find God described in many ways: by function (the roles God takes), attribute and metaphor (what God is like), and action (what God does). The following exercise applies to all of the passages.

Set aside 3 pages in your journal. On the first page, as you read the passage, write down the nouns and adjectives that describe God (shepherd, refuge, gracious, etc.). On the second page, write the verbs describing what God does (provides, leads, protects, etc.). On the third page, ask yourself when have I experienced this role, attribute, or action in my life? Write down a few words to identify the experience or memory.

Please note: It does not have to be an event you attribute to God specifically. For example, if you are thinking of a time when you felt protected, your protector might have been another person. The important thing is to think about what it felt like to be protected.

Try to imagine yourself back in the experience. What were you feeling? How do you feel about that memory now? Finally, talk to God about your experience and feelings. What do you want to say to God? Write your response in your journal, then pray it, silently or aloud.

1 - Psalm 23:1-5

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

2 - Psalm 46:1-3

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult."

3 - Psalm 116: 5-7

"Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you."

4 - Micah 7:18-19

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

5 - Isaiah 40: 28-29

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless."

6 - 2 Samuel 22:32-34

"For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to stand on the heights."

7 - 1 John 4: 8-12

"Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."

Reflection from Henri Nouwen:

It might sound strange, but God wants to find me as much as, if not more than, I want to find God. Yes, God needs me as much as I need God. God is not the patriarch who stays home, doesn't move, and expects his children to come to him, apologize for their aberrant behavior, beg for forgiveness, and promise to do better. To the contrary, he leaves the house, ignoring his dignity by running toward them, pays no heed to apologies and promises of change, and brings them to the table richly prepared for them.

I am beginning to now see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but, instead, as the One who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding.

Session 5 - What is my relationship with God?

This week we will explore our relationship with God, and, Who Does God Say that I am. All relationships are built on a foundation of understanding and communication, but our deepest and most cherished relationships are also encompassed in love, kindness, forgiveness, and purpose. As you move through the week and meditate on the verses below, try to open yourself to the depth and possibilities of a relationship with our Creator, and His son, Jesus Christ.

1 - Jeremiah 1:5

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

Isaiah 43:1-2

*"But now, this is what the Lord says –
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze."*

Question to consider and journal: What do you think it means to be set apart, redeemed, and summoned by name? How does it feel knowing that God will be with you as you pass through raging rivers and fire?

2 - 1 Corinthians 6:17

"But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

John 15: 1-5

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Question to consider and journal: for you, what does it mean to be one spirit with the Lord and connected to the vine? What branches in your life might need pruning? Do you believe that 'apart from God you can do nothing'?

3 - Romans 8:17

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Titus 3:7

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Question to consider and journal: What does it mean to you to be heir of God? How does it feel to be saved by His grace and mercy, and not because of any righteous thing you have done or will do?

4 -Hebrews 4:14-16

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Matthew 7:11

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Question to consider and journal: Describe how it might feel to ask a stranger for something vs. your best friend. How would your expectations and their responses be different? Would you approach a stranger with confidence or some hesitation?

5 -Romans 8:35-39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written. ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Philippians 1:6

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Question to consider and journal: What words or verses in these passages above stick out to you? When you reflect on this week’s verses, which ones have had an impact on your relationship with Jesus? Why?

Session 6 - Does having God in my life make a difference?

Some thoughts to take with you as you journey through this week with God.

- How has God entered the lives of His people?
- Have you ever felt God's presence in your life? If so, how has God entered your life?
- If you have never felt God in your life can you identify any underlying causes that might block you from feeling God's presence?
- When you read the Scripture can you identify what changed when God entered the lives of his people?
- Has God transformed your life in any way?

1 - Genesis 17:1-8

"When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

How does Abraham being 99 years old make you think about God's plan for you?

What might Abraham be feeling as he falls on his face before God and hears his message?

How does God's promise to Abraham about being the the father of nations and kings make you feel about the promise God has made to each one of us?

2 - Exodus 1:12b-14

"And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves."

How does today's reading make you consider the roles of fear (dread) and power relationships in today's culture? In your own life?

3 - Exodus 2:23-24

"...and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."

Have you heard God's voice through the pain of your own suffering? What did it sound or feel like? How did it change the nature of your suffering?

4- Exodus 6:2-6

"God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as

sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.'

What does today's reading make you think about God's promises?

"Great acts of judgement" sounds like something we should all be afraid of. But God says He will redeem Moses (who killed a man) through them. Take a moment to ponder this.

5 - Isaiah 53:4-6

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Consider what it means when Isaiah says that he is "smitten by God..." or "with his wounds we are healed" or "All we like sheep have gone astray."

6 - 1 Cor 5:15

"Christ died for us that we who live might no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf."

What does it mean to "no longer live for ourselves"? Can you think of a time or even just a moment, in which you were not living for yourself? What did that feel like?

7 - Matthew 5:3-12

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

How does today's reading make you feel? Whom does it include? Does it exclude anybody? Does this radical inclusion impact your love-of-neighbor? Does it impact how you love yourself?

Session 7: Hearing God's Voice:

This week is an opportunity to dive deeper into contemplative type prayer; to listen, or be in communion, with God. Often, we think of prayer as a time of thanking God and offering our requests for guidance and healing, etc. This type of prayer is wonderful and not to be discounted.

Prayer life will aid in deepening our relationship, or connection, with God. One way to view prayer is as having a "conversation" with God that includes quieting our own voice, or our side of the conversation to listen for God. The suggestion for prayer this week is to find a space that allows you to quiet your mind and to listen.

Quieting your mind can be a challenge. For some this might mean sitting in a favorite chair in a quiet room as a way to remove distraction. For some this might mean contemplative walking, playing music, gardening, or swimming.; These and others are activities that may serve to occupy the body in a familiar rhythmic manner as the mind is available for contemplation. In other words, this type of prayer is uniquely individual but the shared characteristic is listening, and finding a greater communion or connection with the Holy Spirit.

It may be helpful to reimagine the definition of "listening" or "hearing". How do we listen or hear to one another? What aids in listening for you? What senses are used in listening? What forms might the voice of God take?

1- Psalm 46:10

"Be still and know that I am God!"

One might think of a conversation with God in the same way one thinks of a conversation with a peer, namely a back-and-forth exchange. Conversely, some scholars note that God's voice, even in deep prayer, is "absent". Mother Teresa spoke of hearing God only once, but very clearly. Jim Finley, presenter from the Center for Action and Contemplation, offers a unique perspective in that he explains not hearing God's voice during his "daily rendezvous with God" as God trying to wean him from his need to experience hearing God constantly.

Question for your journal: Note your conversations with God during the week. What, if anything, supported your ability to make space for listening for God's voice? Jot down your thoughts and/or experiences about leaving "space" or listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit.

2- Isaiah 30:21

"And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

Question for your journal: God is with you no matter where you go or which way you turn. How does that feel to know to know that God is with you always seeking to guide you?

Revelation 3:20

"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come into you and eat with you, and you with me."

Question for your journal: God desires to be in your life, but God will not force God's self upon you. Are you ready to open the door and let God who desires you into your life? What are your thoughts/experiences with the presence or absence of God's voice?

3- Jeremiah 33:3

"Call to me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Question for your journal: Think about a time that you have asked God for something specific. This may have been a prayer for healing or a sign from God in a discernment in your life. What did you experience? Was God's response what you expected? Have you ever experienced an answer from God that you felt required you to do something that you were unprepared for in some way or that surprised you?

5 - John 10:27

"My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me".

Question for your journal: How do we know it is God's voice that we are hearing and not our own voice? Describe a situation in which you were confident of God's voice in your life or a time in which you had difficulty hearing God. What, if anything, does this require of you?

6 -Lamentations 3:25-29

*"The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for a man to bear the yoke
while he is young.*

*Let him sit alone in silence,
for the LORD has laid it on him.
Let him bury his face in the dust –
there may yet be hope."*

Question for your journal: As your week progresses make note of your environment, prayer routine, scripture reading, time of day during your prayer time. Are there things that make it more conducive to making space for God's voice? What makes paying "greater attention" as our scripture tells us harder or easier for you during the week.

7 - Jeremiah 29:11-13

"For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile."

Question for your journal: Look back on your prayers and journaling for the week. What is the take-away for hearing God more fully and deepening your relationship? What makes hearing God's voice clear for you? How do you feel if you do not hear God's voice at times?

Session 8- What is God calling me to do?

1 - Micah 6:8

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Question for your journal – In what ways have you done justice or loved kindness? In what ways could you do justice or love kindness now? Imagine literally walking with God – what do you say to each other? Or do you just walk in companionable silence?

2 - Joel 2:28-29

"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit."

Question for your journal – Imagine God pouring God's spirit down on you as a warm, gentle, fragrant, delightful shower. Do not doubt that God does this for you. God has said he will do this over all flesh, and you are no exception! God's spirit always involves a gift. Is your gift to prophesy (speak truth to those who need to hear it), to dream (picture how things could be), see visions (share the vision of God's redeemed creation), or something else? (It's OK to say, "I don't know, Lord. Show me!") But then sit quietly for a bit to see what God may say to you.)

3 - Matthew 28:19-20

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Question for your journal – St. Francis of Assisi is supposed to have said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." In what ways do your words and actions speak of your relationship with God? In what ways might they speak of your relationship with God? As you pray, remember that Jesus is with you forever.

4 - Romans 12: 4-8

"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

Question for your journal – Which of the gifts listed by St. Paul do you have? Do not give in to false modesty! God has most definitely gifted you with both a unique constellation of gifts and a unique situation in life. You are most definitely part of Christ's Body – connected, tenderly cared for. What is your unique function in the Body? If the answer to this question does not come easily, ask God to reveal it to you.

5 – 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

Question for your journal – Not every God-given talent is a “spiritual gift.” A spiritual gift is one which connects you to others in doing God’s work, even if you are working in different ways. When have you felt part of an effort larger than yourself to do good? Which of your qualities contributed most effectively to that effort? Once again, if the answer to this question does not come easily, ask God to reveal it to you.

6 – 2 Peter 1:10

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble.”

Question for your journal – If you had absolute confidence that you would never stumble, what would you do that you are not doing already?

7 – Revelation 22:17

“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.”

Question for your journal – Imagine yourself coming into Jesus’ physical presence for sustenance. Imagine being showered with gifts. Then copy the following into your journal and fill in the blanks as best as you can:

- God is calling me into a deeper relationship with himself. The way I see that happening in my life right now is_____.
- I will open myself to that deepening relationship by_____.

Everyone together

Session 9 -Final get-together

What did you learn about God - about yourself?

How are you going to live into this new relationship?