

The
Methodist
Book
of Daily
Prayer

SAMPLER



The Methodist
Book of Daily Prayer

Edited by Matt Miofsky

Abingdon Press
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THE METHODIST BOOK OF DAILY PRAYER

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A Word About This Sample

We are pleased to provide this sample of *The Methodist Book of Daily Prayer* for pastors and other leaders at our United Methodist Annual Conferences. The sample offers just a taste of what you'll find in the finished book and includes 3 weeks of daily prayer practices. The finished book will include 52 weeks. The book is organized by liturgical season, with Ordinary Time divided into two sections, Sow and Harvest.

The morning and evening reflections come from a variety of sources, including original material written by the general editor, Matt Miofsky, and a team of United Methodist pastors who are also experienced writers in this genre. Many of the evening reflections are drawn from a wide variety of historical and contemporary sources; a team of scholars from our Methodist seminaries provided recommendations for this content. The contributing editor, Lacey Warner, is providing scholarly and practical guidance for the project overall, along with specific recommendations for existing content.

The layout and design of the finished book will be similar to this sample, but not exactly the same, as the book is still in production. We would be grateful for any feedback you have that might help us to make this resource one you will value and use for years to come. Please send feedback to MBDP@umpublishing.org.

Introduction

This book was born out of conversations with pastors, church leaders, and other Christians who lamented that they lacked a personal daily devotional habit. Even those of us who serve in ministry can find ourselves at a loss when it comes to our own spiritual health. There are several reasons we find it hard to keep a daily discipline of prayer and reading. We are busy, our schedules are erratic, our spaces are often cramped, and many of us lack a resource to help us. We aren't always sure what to pray, and sometimes we don't know where to start with reading the Bible for our own edification. Many of us want a guide for spiritual practice that is thoughtfully curated, historically rooted, and enriched by diverse contemporary voices that are engaged in day-to-day ministry. *The Methodist Book of Daily Prayer* is that resource.

The book is simple to use and accessible no matter your experience with scripture or spiritual practice. Each daily devotional practice can be completed in a few minutes. Each week has a **theme** and a **morning and evening prayer practice**. Each weekday has a **morning and evening scripture**, devotional **reflection**, and **prayer**. The brief **scripture passages are included in the text** for each day, so there's no flipping back and forth between the book and your Bible. The devotional reflections include **contemporary and historical voices** around the theme of the week. The morning prayers focus on **petitions** to God. Evening prayers focus on **gratitude**, helping you to reflect on the day. While each devotional can be done in a few minutes, you can also extend the prayer and reflection time for as long as you would like. Some of you will want to do both the morning and evening every day. If you are new to this habit, maybe try one or the other. The book is meant to be something you can use year after year in whatever way is most beneficial for you.

For those of you who are new to a habit of daily prayer and devotion, here are a few suggestions:

- Decide on a consistent time each day when you will read and pray. Try as best you can to stick to that specific time.

- Choose a dedicated place for your daily prayer. It can be a certain chair in the house, room, or spot at your office.
- Keep this book out in the open so you see it every day.
- The daily prayers are interactive, asking you to reflect on and voice your own prayers with the given prompts. Writing down your thoughts or journaling your petitions and points of gratitude is an excellent way to track your prayer life over time. Consider keeping a journal as part of this spiritual practice.
- The scripture passages printed in the book are very short. If one sparks your interest, get a bible and read more. If you're keeping a journal, maybe write about your thoughts on the scripture.
- Finally, don't be hard on yourself. If you miss a practice, just let it go and jump back in on the next given day. If a practice each morning and evening is unrealistic, do the mornings one year and the evenings the next.

The importance of this book is in the daily habit that it seeks to form. As you form this habit, it will become easier.

May God bless you in this new discipline and may you hear God's voice more clearly as you open up your heart, mind and life to God.

Week 1

Advent

Hope

Morning Petition Prayer for the week:

God as I start a new day, I renew my hope in you and belief that you are at work in my life. There is a gap between the way the world is and the way you want it to be. That same gap exists in me. May I look beyond, hoping and working alongside you for what will be. Today I name:

- my hopes for what you might do in my life;
- my hopes for what you might do in my relationships and friendships;
- my hopes for what you might do in my church;
- my hopes for what you might do in my neighborhood and community;
- my hopes for what you might do in our country and world.

As I name my hopes to you enlist me to play a role in the work you are already doing. Amen.

Evening Gratitude Prayer for the week:

God as the day draws to a close, I confess that I did not always live out of a sense of hope. Forgive me for the way that today I:

- chose cynicism over promise;
- assumed the worst instead of the best in others;
- gave up or gave in instead of standing up or stepping out;
- acted as if your power is not real instead of believing you are able.

As this day draws to a close and as I sleep, renew in me a sense of hope and possibility.
Amen.

Day 1

Morning

Therefore, once you have your minds ready for action and you are thinking clearly, place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1.13)

Reflection

The source of our hope is a consequential matter. We sometimes find ourselves believing in God but not acting like it. This is called functional atheism, which Parker Palmer defines as “the belief that ultimately responsibility for everything rests with me.” We might pray, go to church, read scripture, and sing songs about the power of God. But then we stress, over-function, and burn out, under the misguided notion that our lives are shaped by our own efforts. We place our hope in God, but only in part. Peter reminds us to rely on Jesus—on grace—as our source of complete hope, trusting that God is worthy not only of our partial faith but all of it.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

But I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more. (Psalm 71.14)

Reflection

What does it mean to “hope continually”?

Perhaps the way to embody hope is to disconnect it from an expected outcome, and instead, to take on a posture that declares a movement towards some alternate

reality. Hope can be so fleeting, present one moment, then gone the next, leading to disappointment and discouragement.

But when hope is a posture, hope is rooted in the onward movement towards that alternate reality. It accepts that life will have its ups and downs. This posture allows for one to hope continually, because the end of the journey is belovedness, when all would know God's hope, joy, peace and love.

What is interesting is the way that the psalmist ties these two actions in the future tense. Despite the experiences that have brought the psalmist to write these words, despite the circumstances that bring the psalmist to cry out for rescue and relief, there is a commitment to hope and praise. It isn't conditional; it is simply a declaration of what is to come.

May our hope be continual, firmly grounded in God's promise of God's preferred future.

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 2

Morning

*The expectations of the righteous result in joy,
but the hopes of the wicked will perish. (Prov. 10.28)*

Reflection

Hope and hopefulness are not intrinsically good. Money can be both the object and source of hope for a greedy heart. Physical security for a fearful heart. Achievement for a selfish heart. Acclaim for an insecure heart. Each one is fading, temporal, bringing at best only fleeting happiness. And there are many others, of course, none worthy objects of our deepest hope, none truly a source of enduring hope. The proverb challenges us to consider the nature of our own hearts. It calls us to question where our hope comes from and what we hope for. It prompts us to recognize God—God's

wisdom, and God's presence as our true sources of hope. This hope leads to deep and lasting joy.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

And all who have this hope in him purify themselves even as he is pure. (1 John 3.3)

Reflection

“For were you to be disappointed of your Hope, still you lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your Hope: it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every Day, every Hour, every Moment. Why not this Hour, this Moment? Certainly you may look for it now. If you believe it is by Faith.”

—John Wesley, *Scripture Way of Salvation* (1765: III. 18)

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 3

Morning

Return to the stronghold, prisoners of hope.

Moreover, declare today that I will return double to you. (Matt. 12.21)

Reflection

Perhaps you've heard a version of the idea that Christians are never allowed to give up hope. Believers in Jesus are hopelessly hopeful! We cannot stop trusting that God is at work in our life and in the world. We cannot stop believing that the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in our life as well. We cannot stop putting our confidence in a God who is making all things well. If Christ is risen, if the Holy Spirit

is present, if death has been defeated, and if God is reconciling all things to Godself—then pain, suffering, and evil are on a timer. Real though they are, they will not last. To believe in Jesus is to be, as the prophet says, a “prisoner of hope.”

Prayer of Petition

Evening

I meet the predawn light and cry for help.

I wait for your promise. (Ps. 119.147)

Reflection

“Whatever may be the tensions and the stresses of a particular day, there is always lurking close at hand the trailing beauty of forgotten joy or unremembered peace.”

—Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Beacon Press, 2014), p. 211

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 4

Morning

LORD, show us favor; we hope in you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in times of distress. (Isa. 33.2)

Reflection

What does it mean to place our hope in God? Why would such a hope give us strength and salvation during times of distress? Part of the answer lies in the difference between something that is temporary and something that is eternal. Many people struggle with seasonal affective disorder. When the air is cold and the sky is gray, a depression sets in. If you experience this condition, you learn something over time. The winter season

may seem to drag on, but we know it is temporary. It will change, and it will break forth into spring. You can place your hope not on the day to day weather, but in the confidence that spring is coming. In life, our hope comes not from our day-to-day circumstances which can vary, but from a strong confidence that even today, God is working for our good, and something better is coming.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

This hope, which is a safe and secure anchor for our whole being, enters the sanctuary behind the curtain. (Heb. 6.19)

Reflection

Do you ever wonder if Jesus had hope?

Into a world of oppression, a world defined by the rules of empire, Mary births the One called Emmanuel, God with us, and with him would arrive the hopes of the nations. He will go on to shoulder the burdens of imagining a new way, a better way, different than the kingdoms of earth, centered on belovedness and togetherness and oneness with God and with community...

Through it all, did Jesus, himself, have hope? Did he experience this human emotion of expectancy for a world that could be?

Too often, it is the human condition to connect hope to an uncertain outcome, to assume that hope requires a component of unknowing. And therefore, one's Christology might then disqualify Jesus from having hope.

But I need Jesus to have had hope so that he might fully be the embodiment of humanity's hopes. I need a hope-filled Jesus who lived his life and died his death with the expectancy of a world not yet, so that the ways we model our lives, anchored in his ways, might move us from a world not yet, into a world that could be.

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 5

Morning

We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. This hope doesn't put us to shame. (Rom. 5.3-5)

Reflection

Hope is forged in the midst of hardship and struggle. If life always unfolded the way that we expected, there would be no need for hope. We would never long for something that we do not currently have. But of course this isn't how life works. Life is full of surprises, changed plans, disappointments and problems. These challenges can either be the occasion for despair or the beginning of a pathway that leads to hope. Those troubles can produce perseverance and strength. That strength can shape and mold our heart and life. And in the midst of this persistent determination to keep moving forward, we craft a hope that comes not from a trouble free life, but from knowing that God is more powerful than our current trials.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

I hope, Lord.

My whole being hopes,

and I wait for God's promise. (Ps. 130.5)

Reflection

Come thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free,
From our fears and sins relieve us,
Let us find our rest in thee:

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art,
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a king,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now thy gracious kingdom bring;
By thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone,
By thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to thy glorious throne.

—Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 2nd ed. (London: Strahan, 1745),
#10

Prayer of Gratitude

Week 15

Lent

Listening

Morning Petition Prayer for the week:

God of the still small voice, give me the ears today to listen to you. Help me to hear what you are speaking into my life:

- help me to hear you speak into my ambitions and priorities;
- help me to hear you speak into my relationships;
- help me to hear you speak into my direction and goals;
- help me to hear you speak into my habits and behavior.

Today, give me the patience to hear, the space to listen, and the courage to trust what you are saying to me. Amen.

Evening Gratitude Prayer for the week:

God as the day draws to a close, I pause to name where I have seen and heard you today:

- to name the way you spoke through others;
- to name the way I felt you nudge and guide me;
- to name any new insight you gave;
- to name the ways you challenged me.

Thank you for being a God still at work and speaking into my life. Help me to seek your voice more often, listen more intently, and trust your direction. Amen.

Day 1

Morning

While he was still speaking, look, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son whom I dearly love. I am very pleased with him. Listen to him!" Hearing this, the disciples fell on their faces, filled with awe. (Matt. 17.5-6)

Reflection

As kids, we often don't listen to the grownups around us. Perhaps you had a parent at some point say to you, "if you hear me, then why don't you listen?!" We all know there is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is taking in the words that someone else is speaking. But listening means something more. Listening implies an obedience; doing something with the words you hear. Many of us read scripture and know the words that Jesus speaks. Some of us might even spend a great dwell of time studying those words, their context, their history, and their interpretations. But as leaders, we must be careful not to merely hear Jesus and but to also listen to him. Discipleship is not merely understanding his words but also an obedience to follow them.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

*Listen, my people, to my teaching;
tilt your ears toward the words of my mouth. (Ps. 78.10)*

Reflection

It is a surprising thing to learn that God, whom we call all-powerful, mighty, and Lord, does not usually speak with force. God, who made the wind and the waves, who gave the lion his roar, and the bear her growl, does not often shout. Instead,

God prefers to whisper. God's voice comes to us most frequently in quiet ways, not heard through our ears, but with our heart. Hearing that quiet voice of God requires us to listen with intention and care. It requires stillness. It requires silence. It requires attentiveness.

God will not force communication upon us, we have to choose to listen. This means when we pray, we need to not only talk to God, but also to listen. Prayer needs to contain moments of openness, trusting that God has something to say to us. God's promptings might sound like a voice in our heads, or a knowing in our guts, or an image that appears to us. It takes patience and practice but if we ask, God will speak. God will give us insight, convict us of our errors, reassure us, or inspire us to act. When we listen, the power and wisdom contained in that quiet and holy voice will be worth the wait.

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 2

Morning

Moses told this to the Israelites. But they didn't listen to Moses, because of their complete exhaustion and their hard labor. (Ex. 6.9)

Reflection

Several studies show that when we are tired, not only do our default behaviors change but so do our personalities. We are literally different people when we get fatigued. Weariness can stunt our curiosity, hamper our creativity, sap our patience, and impair our ability to listen to others who care about us. There is a danger in trying to live in a constant state of fatigue. When you are tired, be careful and be more intentional to seek out and listen to the voices of people who care about you. Ask others if they can see things that you can't see. Be even more deliberate even in listening to words that you don't want to hear. Often when we are tired, others can see things that in our

exhaustion we can't see. Listening to them can help point us towards a healthier way of living.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

If you listen to these case laws and follow them carefully, the LORD your God will keep the covenant and display the loyalty that he promised your ancestors. (Deut. 7.12)

Reflection

“We must learn to differ without denouncing; to listen without distrust; to reserve judgment. ‘Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged. And with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again.’ You know the words, my friends.”

—Mary McLeod Bethune, “The Lesson of Tolerance” (1952), in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World*, eds. McCluskey and Smith, 267

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 3

Morning

Listen, Job; hear me;

be quiet, and I will speak. (Job 33.31)

Reflection

Have you ever gone out into the woods, away from all manufactured noise and artificial light? Without a phone buzzing or music playing, the sheer quiet can be striking and overwhelming. But if you sit in that quiet long enough, the forest begins

to come alive around you. You begin to hear things that you never noticed before. The sound of limbs swaying, the melodic chirping of birds, the howling of the wind, or even the crunching of leaves from nearby animals. These sounds are always available to us. We just don't often stop and quiet ourselves long enough to hear them. We often wish God would speak more clearly to us, but have you ever wondered if the problem isn't with God speaking, but with our ability to listen? As we create margin in our lives, care for our bodies, and make space for our spirit we will also find that our ability to listen heightens and we can begin to see and hear God all around us. God is always present. What fluctuates is our ability to actually listen.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who listen to God's word and do it." (Luke 8.21)

Reflection

Jesus says that listening to God is what makes us family. That's a short list of qualifications to call someone a brother or sister. It means that geography doesn't matter. Age doesn't matter. Income doesn't matter. Language, skin color, sexual orientation or gender identity, height, weight, spiritual credentials, life experience, ability or disability, none of it matters. All that is needed to be a part of the family of God is to hear the word of God, pay attention, and do it.

Jesus also seems to be saying that we are not expected to hear alone, in isolation. Rather we listen together. He implies the very act of listening to the word of God is communal as it makes us siblings. Listening to the word of God draws us closer to other people and unites us in a powerful and deep way. This is part of the way God transforms us. As we seek the will of God, we must do it with others. These relationships with one another shape us and help us grow. And they help us truly hear God's will for the world. Listening to God, as a family, leads us to holiness.

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 4

Morning

The religious experts said to Pharaoh, "This is something only God could do!" But Pharaoh was stubborn, and he wouldn't listen to them, just as the LORD had said. (Ex. 8.19)

Reflection

We have all dealt with people (or kids) that dig their heels in and despite our best efforts, simply won't listen to us. In their stubbornness they have formed an opinion that is not open for negotiation and will not change. In scripture, this is often called hard-heartedness. Despite what we say, many of us are closed to new information. We are unwilling to change, indifferent to new voices, and stubbornly unwilling to listen to God or others. Listening, however, implies a posture of openness, a humility that recognizes that you may not understand something fully, and a teachable spirit that is willing to change in light of new information. The prerequisite for listening is humility; a recognition that there is still a need for growth.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

He said, "Whoever has ears to listen should pay attention!" (Mark 4.9)

Reflection

"God implanted in the heart of the youthful Francis a certain openhanded compassion for the poor. Growing from his infancy (Job 31:18), this compassion had so filled his heart with generosity that even at that time he determined not to be deaf to the Gospel but to give to everyone who begged (Luke 6:30), especially if he asked 'for the love of God.'"

—Bonaventure, “The Life of St. Francis” quoted in William Placher, ed., *Callings* (2005), 143

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 5

Morning

Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come close. Listen to the words of the LORD your God.” (Josh. 3.9)

Reflection

Have you ever been at a dinner with a large group of people? It is difficult to hear the person at the other end of the table. It is common sense but the ability to hear someone is proportional to how close you are to them. The same is true spiritually. It is harder to hear God speaking to us if we have drifted in our faith life. When we make little time for prayer, neglect any quiet space, stop worshiping, or no longer read scripture for our own growth, it is no wonder that we struggle to hear God. If you want to be more in tune with the voice of God, begin practicing those disciplines that move you closer to God. The closer you get, the easier it will be to hear.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

Listen, my people, I’m warning you!

If only you would listen to me, Israel. (Ps. 81.8)

Reflection

The sorrowing, the sick, the unwanted, the lonely, both young and old, rich and poor, all come to my window. No one listens, they tell me, and so I listen and tell them what

they have just told me. And I sit in silence, listening, letting them grieve. 'Julian, you are wise,' they say, 'You have been gifted with understanding.' All I did was listen. For I believe full surely that God's spirit is in us all, giving light, wisdom, understanding, speaking words in us when we cannot speak, showing us gently what we would not see; what we are afraid to see; so that we may show pity, mercy, forgiveness to ourselves.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

Prayer of Gratitude

Week 36

Sow

Rest

Morning Prayer of Petition for the week:

God today I make the active choice to dwell in your rest. To join you in delighting in the world you made. Help me to be obedient to your command by naming:

- what is clattering in my life, distracting me from you;
- what feels like toil and work, draining my energy;
- what I am trying to control that I can let go of;
- what is betraying my ability to feel joy.

Today help me to remember that my life is more than what I produce, to be aware of what distracts and drains me, and to find opportunities to rest in you. Amen.

Evening Prayer of Gratitude for the week:

God as the day draws to a close, I stop to see and name where you have been at work in my day:

- for the moments of surprise;
- the moments of learning;
- the moments of assurance;
- the moments of relief and help.

Thank you for being present with me even when I am not present with you. Help me to trust you more fully, and to find my rest in you. Amen.

Day 1

Morning

Many people were coming and going, so there was no time to eat. He said to the apostles, "Come by yourselves to a secluded place and rest for a while." (Mark 6.31)

Reflection

In my first job I struggled to ever take a vacation day. While I knew that I was allowed a certain number of days off, I felt guilty stepping away from my work and lazy for taking time to simply relax. Amid this struggle, a mentor and boss told me to think of it this way—"think of vacation days as times when we pay you to relax." Some of us are such over-achievers that rest just feels wrong. We mistakenly believe that we must always be productive, never be idle, and that recreation is for the lazy. But here we find Jesus asking, indeed commanding his disciples to come away to a secluded place and rest. This is not optional. It is a direct request by Jesus to them. To fail to do it would be disobedience or worse, a dereliction of discipleship. For followers of Jesus, rest is not optional, it is part of the expectations of the one who leads us.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Don't do any work on it. (Deut. 5.13-14a)

Reflection

"He who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of being yoked to toil. He must go away from the screech of

dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his own life. He must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of man. Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else. Six days a week we seek to dominate the world, on the seventh day we try to dominate the self.”

—Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath*

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 2

Morning

*If you stop trampling the Sabbath,
stop doing whatever you want on my holy day,
and consider the Sabbath a delight,
sacred to the LORD, honored,
and honor it instead of doing things your way,
seeking what you want and doing business as usual,
then you will take delight in the LORD. (Isa. 59.13-14a)*

Reflection

I regularly “trample on the Sabbath.” Recently I had a major project due but procrastinated and filled my week with other work. Left with no choice, I spent my Sunday working instead of resting, enjoying family, and connecting with those I care about. I convinced myself that this was necessary, just this one time. But that was a lie. It was neither necessary, nor unavoidable. It was a choice. It is tempting to justify our regular trampling of the Sabbath by convincing ourselves we have no choice. But that is rarely true. Breaching the Sabbath and failing to take a day of rest is almost always a

result of us doing things our own way instead of God's. But here Isaiah reminds us that when we stop trampling on the Sabbath, then we are finally able to take delight in God and the gifts God has given us.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

I am the LORD your God! Follow my regulations! Observe my case laws and do them! Make my sabbaths holy and let them be a sign between us that I am the LORD your God. (Ezek. 20.19-20)

Reflection

There is an Orthodox synagogue in my neighborhood and many of my neighbors are observant Jews. On Saturdays I see them walking to temple with their families, going to one another's homes on Friday night for Shabbat dinners. When it's raining, they don raincoats because they are not permitted to carry umbrellas on the Sabbath. Once some neighbors had a blown fuse on a Saturday morning and had to ask the Catholics next door to come and flip the breaker. From the outside, it's easy to see this strict observance of the Sabbath as a bunch of silly rules—a list of “thou shall nots,” that make little sense in our modern world. But part of me is a bit envious of my neighbors and their community's commitment to dedicating 24 hours each week to God. I wonder what my life might be like if I were to take a day each week and resist the urge to fill it with activities? To log off my email on Friday nights and simply spend time with my family or friends? How might my relationship with God change with fewer distractions? I think there is something I can learn from my neighbors' practice of honoring God by “keeping the Sabbath holy.”

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 3

Morning

So you see that a sabbath rest is left open for God's people. The one who entered God's rest also rested from his works, just as God rested from his own. (Heb. 4.9-10)

Reflection

Anyone with a laptop knows that while battery life seems to get better each year, even the best computers can't last long without regularly and consistently connecting back to a power source. In fact, the kind of batteries in most computers function better and last longer if you keep them above a 50 percent charge. Draining the battery all the way will reduce its capacity and shorten its overall life. Though we have a tough time admitting it, we do not have endless supplies of physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual energy. Part of being human means that we are finite. We wear out. We get tired. We grow weary. We have to regularly connect back to a power source. And while it is tempting to only do this when we absolutely have to, you will work better, stay healthier, and live longer if you regularly allow God to strengthen and renew you.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

I will strengthen the weary and renew those who are weak. (Jer. 31.25)

Reflection

“There shall be the great Sabbath which has no evening, which God celebrated among His first works, as it is written, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that

in it He had rested from all His work which God began to make.’ For we shall ourselves be the seventh day, when we shall be filled and replenished with God’s blessing and sanctification. There shall we be still, and know that He is God; that He is that which we ourselves aspired to be when we fell away from Him, and listened to the voice of the seducer, ‘Ye shall be as gods,’ and so abandoned God, who would have made us as gods, not by deserting Him, but by participating in Him. For without Him what have we accomplished, save to perish in His anger? But when we are restored by Him, and perfected with greater grace, we shall have eternal leisure to see that He is God, for we shall be full of Him when He shall be all in all.”

—Augustine, *City of God*

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 4

Morning

*Unless it is the LORD who builds the house,
the builders’ work is pointless.*

*Unless it is the LORD who protects the city,
the guard on duty is pointless.*

*It is pointless that you get up early and stay up late,
eating the bread of hard labor
because God gives sleep to those he loves. (Ps. 127.1-2)*

Reflection

No one likes to think that their work is pointless. In fact, we often act as if the exact opposite is true. We get tempted to think the role we play or the work we do is absolutely essential. We treat our meetings as if they are tackling the most pressing concerns of the day. We are tethered to our devices, checking them obsessively lest some critical matter pops up. We struggle to take a day, much less a week off. There

is something almost offensively sobering about the scripture telling us that what we think is so important, is actually pointless. That isn't to say that what we do doesn't have value. But the value of our activity is compromised if we fail to recognize God's ultimate power in and over it. When we make ourselves out to be so important, we forget who is actually important. When we think that the world (or our workplace or family) will fall apart if we take a break, we fail to recognize by whose power the world is actually sustained. We may think that things in life depend on us, but they don't. What we do is always done in cooperation with, and under the power of one who is ultimately in control. Recognizing and remembering that not only adds value to what we do, but allows us the ability to step away from it.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11.28)

Reflection

“Come unto me,” Jesus says.

Like a grandmother who always has a jug of iced tea and freshly baked cookies ready.
Like a dear friend who is always there to pick up the phone and listen to your troubles.
Like a church where the doors are wide open, and a friendly face is there to welcome you:

“Come in, just as you are.”

Jesus invites us to come to him. He sees our struggles and the weights of the world we are carrying. He knows our pain and our worries. We don't have to explain anything to him. He already knows, and he welcomes us in love to come, sit a spell. Just rest.

Leave your shoes by the door, he says, and stay a while. Here's a blanket and a glass of cold water. Let me take your coat. Have a seat here, on this comfortable sofa. There now.

*You are safe. Close your eyes, if you want. Let me lay a soft blanket over you.
Shhh. All is well. All is well. All will be well.*

Prayer of Gratitude

Day 5

Morning

News of him spread even more and huge crowds gathered to listen and to be healed from their illnesses. But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places for prayer. (Luke 5.15)

Reflection

Every excuse we have for not being able to honor the sabbath, to rest, and to take time for being instead of doing withers with this passage. Here Jesus himself models rest, and at the expense of life saving work. News about Jesus spread primarily because he was miraculously healing people. Just prior to his withdrawal to the desert he cured a man's skin disease with a simple touch. And immediately after this time of prayer he was nearly trapped in a house by a crowd of people who wanted him to heal them. Every minute of every day could have been spent addressing eminently important work—the physical, emotional, and mental needs of people who were suffering. And yet, Jesus withdraws to pray. Many might read this and wonder what Jesus was thinking, and can reasonably speculate on an answer. But regardless, the story serves as a challenge, an indictment of any excuse we have not to take a break, not to rest, and not to prioritize connecting with God. If Jesus can make the time to pray, then so can we.

Prayer of Petition

Evening

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. (Exod. 20.8)

Reflection

“The moral law contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, He [Christ] did not take away. It was not the design of His coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken... Every part of this law must remain in force upon all (hu)mankind and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other.”

—John Wesley, *Sermons*

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