

From the Pastor's Pen: Praying through Advent

At the Whispering Knolls Bible Study we've been going through Bishop Michael Rinehart of the Gulf Coast Synod's book "Learning to Pray Again." In it he gives 40 different prayer practices. It's all very practical, and always grounded in scripture.

I'm going to challenge you all. For the season of Advent, starting on Sunday the 29th and going until December 24th prepare for the coming of the Christ Child with prayer.

Bishop Rinehart recommends taking half an hour each day for this. This means giving something up, maybe a television show, or ½ an hour of sleep, or even some facebook surfing time. Here is a schedule with 2 practices to choose from each:

November 29th-December 4th

Making time: Our time is part of the treasure that directs our hearts, in fact, how we spend our time is central to our identity—if you spent a lot of time swimming, you're a swimmer, playing soccer you're a soccer player. So, look at your calendar daily and pray for all the things in your day. Consider what God is doing with your time.

Walking Prayer: Jesus met his disciples walking along the road to Emmaus, go for a walk each day this week with an eye to Jesus. Start the walk by giving thanks for the good gifts God has given you and remember those in need. Then as you get going pray for your neighbors you see along the way. Also think through a bible story—rehearse it in your head as you walk.

December 5th-11th

Joys and worries: Create a chart like this:

Worries	Joys

Fill it out each day, and pray for God to assuage your worries and give thanks to Him for your joys!

The Sound of Silence: Try being completely silent for 5 minutes (no nodding off), try to think of nothing... what rushes in? Use the remaining 25 minutes to pray about those things that rushed in.

December 12th-17th

The Whole Situation: Think of a particular person each day who you are interceding for in prayer. Then, once you've named them, and began to think about their situation go a little deeper, think about everything surrounding that situation, the other people involved, the history surrounding it, how everyone is feeling and what their thought processes might be. Then, ask God to enter into every last piece of it.

Understanding, Meditation, Struggle: Read a piece of scripture, perhaps one of the upcoming lessons for the week. Take the time to figure out what it means. Then consider what it means for you, not just it's abstract meaning at the time, but what it is saying to you on this very day. Then, finally, struggle to live out that meaning in your day to day life.

December 18th-24th

Memorized Prayer: Find a prayer or piece of scripture that resonates with you, and take the week to memorize it, so that it is with you whenever you need it, essentially add it to your spiritual toolbox.

If you can't find any prayers or pieces of scripture here are three you could choose from:

The Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen."

The Prayer of Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we 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. Amen."

Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

Journaling: For the next week keep a journal, begin each entry with "Yesterday..." and go from there. Use it to reflect upon what God is up to in your life, and how you are responding.