Let’s face it our lives are busy! Whether a parent, youth, or youth volunteer, our lives are hectic, packed and over scheduled. If we are honest it can be quite challenging to figure out how to have Christ as our first and primary devotion in the midst of our lives. And if we continue to be honest we might also confess that when life gets busy, our spiritual growth can often be the first thing that we put to the side and neglect. “We will have time later when life changes,” we might say.

This newsletter is geared towards trying to help you find ways you can take steps of spiritual growth in the midst of busy lives. However, we always need to be evaluating and contemplating our lives. Just because we are so busy doesn’t mean we are being faithful. God has not called us to conform to our culture but to live counter-cultural lives that point to a new way of living, a kingdom way of living. It’s not always wrong to be busy, but let us stop idolizing and worshiping business, especially at the expense of our faith and our working towards the building of the kingdom of God on earth. I do hope the following pages will help all of us take steps of spiritual growth and that in these spiritual practices we experience God’s grace that enters and transforms our lives.

**Spiritual Formation for Busy Lives**

“Christianity without discipleship will always be Christianity without Christ”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
When You Pray: Daily Practices for Prayerful Living - Rueben P. Job

In the book mentioned above, Job has done a remarkable job of helping us grow in our understanding and love of God. For each week, Job offers us a weekly theme, daily scripture texts, readings, and prayers for a transformative way to encounter God. Below, is one of the week’s readings and reflections. Use it as a guide for devotion and discipleship and if it speaks to you, you can go here to buy the book.

Week 18 - Life Transformed

Becoming Aware of God’s Presence
Tender Shepherd, who promised to be with us always, we welcome you now into our midst and invite you to stay with us all the day long.

Inviting God’s Intervention
Come tender Shepherd and be our guide, strength, and companion in every experience of life today and always.

Listening for God’s Voice
Monday - Romans 12:1-8
Tuesday - Romans 12:14-21
Wednesday - Romans 13:8-14
Thursday - Matthew 5:13-16
Friday - Philippians 1:3-11
Saturday John 17:1-11

Essay:
Living a transformed life does not happen by gritting our teeth and trying harder. It happens as we offer ourselves ever more fully to the One who knows us completely and loves us beyond our ability to comprehend. Of course, we are called to live a disciplined and faithful life, but not on our own. It is God who leads us, strengthens us, and sustains us in a life of faithfulness. And it is God who does the transforming work as we open ourselves more and more to the Spirit’s presence, guidance, and grace. Paul’s confession in 2 Corinthians 3:18 says it well: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord, as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes form the Lord, the Spirit.” When we spend our days and nights in God’s presence, we too will reflect that divine image more and more. This is God’s transforming work in progress in ordinary lives and ordinary times. May it always be the story of our lives.

Quotes:
Every Christian practice requires prayer, as Christians doing things together attune themselves to take part, with trust, in the risky activities of God. In prayer, we open ourselves to respond to God’s presence and notice the light of God as it shines on the world, exposing fault yet also promising hope. We pay attention in a special way, focusing our yearning to be partners in God’s reconciling love. We ask for God’s help in saying yes to that which is life-giving in the deepest sense and in saying the specific no that will loosen whatever chains bind us and others to destruction. We thank God for life and love, and we beg God for mercy and strength, for ourselves and all creation.” Dorothy Bass - Practicing Our Faith

The prayer practice known as The Examen helps us to see the will of God in action. The key to understanding the examen as a practice of discernment is to see how looking backward to identify the movement of God can lead to being guided by God in the future. The examen asks us to look back over a period of time or review an event, looking for glimmers, moments and actions that appear to be either ‘of God’ or not ‘of God.’ The former are the life-giving things that bring the fruits of the Spirit, while the latter are those things that are death-dealing and bring fruits of a spirit that is not God. The prayerful examen-ation of the past helps us in our discernment of the future because we begin to see the trajectory of God’s action in our place and our time. - Daniel Wolpert

The Christ who calls us from the depths of our being, who commissions us to witness to what we know in our hearts, is the one who brings life abundant, not only to us but through us, the church and its members. Each of us chooses to be part of this world’s problems or its solutions, a connection or disconnection from God’s love, a spark fed by the fire of God’s Spirit or one that flies from the fire and dies alone. Jesus was a realist. “In the world you face persecution,’ he stated, ‘but take courage; I have conquered the world.’ - Grace Brame

Reflection Time

Making our Requests Known:
Prayer for Our World, It’s People and Leaders
Prayer for Our Church and Its leaders
Prayer for Those in Our Circle of Responsibility
Prayer for Ourselves

Offering of Self to God
In trust and love we now offer all that we are and have to you and ask you to accept, bless, and use the gift we bring in ways that are pleasing to you; for we know that will be good and right for us.

Blessing:
Bless and make fruitful the life we offer, this day and always, for we are yours
Immigrants

Discover: Jeremiah 22:1-5
The court in Jerusalem during Jeremiah’s time was a place of oppression and inequality. Desperate to buy off the threatening Babylonian army, the king taxed everyone to the hilt (2 Kings 23:35). The burden fell heavily on the most oppressed and marginalized members of society: widows, orphans and the foreigners living in the land.

But God had given rules on the fair treatment of refugees and immigrants. They were to be treated with kindness (Lev 19:33-34); they were to benefit from the same rule of law (Lev 24:22); they were to be helped and supported if necessary (Lev 25:35-37) and they were allowed to participate in the national religious celebrations (Num 9:14).

Now, conveniently, the king and his court were forgetting God’s commands, forgetting how their ancestors had similarly once been an exploited immigrant labor force in Egypt.

And what do we forget about refugees?
Do we forget that they are individuals, loved by God?

Do we forget how our actions as a nation have helped create imbalances of power that result in a world where some people end up becoming refugees? Do we, too, forget God’s words?

Dream
You’ve been granted an audience with the highest authority in the land. You have 15 minutes to speak your mind. What are you going to say?

Do
Pray for groups in your community who welcome and support widows, orphans, immigrants refugees and victims of violence.
Find out where in your community special services are offered to immigrants (such as, learning English, becoming acclimated to the community, etc.) and befriend someone new to your neighborhood

Prayer - Lord, you see and hear everything; you instruct the nations and give knowledge to help us all. Correct us, teach us, guide us.

Check Out:
5 Ways To Be the Church In Current Refugee Crisis
World Vision - Give to help refugees

10 Ways To Get Serious About the Issues of Poverty and Justice
1) Shout Loudly - use your voice to advocate for the well-being and rights of others
2) Spend Wisely - encourage business to have ethical standards, shop to support fair trade
3) Read Avidly - learn about issues and solutions to world issues, be intelligent and seek out information
4) Live Responsibly - live simply so others can simply live
5) Give Lavishly - give to causes and organizations that you care about and are addressing social issues
6) Travel Meaningfully - get out into the world and let your life be transformed
7) Think Biblically - let scripture build your theology for responding to poverty
8) Study Purposefully - use school projects or take classes where you can learn more about aid, development, peace and reconciliation. Go here for online courses
9) Volunteer - Give your time to charities and justice organizations. Build relationships with those who are in poverty
10) Pray Continually - Organize prayer gatherings, pray for a charity, remember that prayer works and become a praying person

The Poverty and Justice Bible
On this page you will read a few selections that come from the Poverty and Justice Bible that are aimed at helping us Discover, Dream and Do
Mission

Discover: Luke 4:16-21
Imagine the scene: Jesus back in his home town, where he grew up as a boy and learned the builder’s trade. Someone says to him, “So what are you doing with yourself these days?”

Here in the synagogue, he answers the questions. He unrolls the scroll and reads from Isaiah 61:1,2. This, says Jesus, is the Jubilee, the year of the Lord’s favor, the year of forgiveness, the expression of God’s love for the poor. It is Jesus’ manifesto, his job description, his statement of intent. He has come to bring good news for all who suffer - poor, the imprisoned, the blind. He sets the pattern and calls people to the banquet with God.

But Jesus brings more to the party. Good news for the poor is not just someone to tell them they are forgiven, it is also someone to lift them out of poverty.

Good news for the homeless is the love of God and a roof over their heads. As followers of Jesus, this is our mission. We tell people about the saving love of Jesus, and we show them what he is like.

Dream:
Envision your special mission as a follower of Jesus. How can you live it out so that others will notice it and be inspired by your efforts?

Do:
Write out your mission statement or manifesto, then put it into action for 21 days. By that time it should become second nature to you.

Prayer:
God, our heavenly parent, thank you for Jesus who has given us a window into your ways. Thank you for your love. You give a helping hand to everyone who falls.

The Prayers of Others

Sometimes a great way to grow in our understanding and love of God is to read the prayers of others and let them teach us, challenge us, inspire us, and draw us into a sweet taste of God’s presence. In the next couple of pages, you will read several different prayers to stir your spirit and draw you into God’s presence. Below are a few resources you can find for more prayers like the ones in the pages below.

Here are several prayer books you should check out:

Prayers - Michel Quoist
Guerrillas of Grace - Ted Loder
Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann
Prayers for a Privileged People - Walter Brueggemann
1000 World Prayers - Marcus Braybrooke
600 Blessings and Prayers From Around the World - Geoffrey Duncan
Lord, Help Me to Say “Yes” - Michel Quoist

I am afraid of saying “yes”, Lord.  
Where will you take me?  
I am afraid of drawing the longer straw,  
I am afraid of signing my name to an unread agreement,  
I am afraid of the “yes” that will entail other “yeses”.

Yet I am not at peace.  
For you pursue me, besiege me.  
I seek out the din for fear of hearing you, but in a moment of silence, you slip through.

I turn from the road,  
for I have caught sight of you,  
but at the end of the path, you are there, awaiting me.  
Where shall I hide?  
I meet you everywhere.  
Is it even possible to escape you?

I am afraid to say “yes”, Lord.  
I am afraid of putting my hand in yours, for you to hold on to it.  
I am afraid of meeting your eyes, for I know you will win me.  
I am afraid of your demands.  
I am hemmed in, yet I continue to hide.  
I am captured, yet I continue to struggle, and I fight, knowing that I am defeated.

For you are the stronger one, Lord,  
you own the world, and you take it from me.  
When I stretch out my hand, to catch hold of people and things, they vanish before my eyes.

I can’t seem to keep anything for myself.  
The flower I pick withers in my hands.  
My laughter freezes on my lips.  
Everything seems empty, everything seems hollow.

For you have made a desert around me.  
I am hungry and thirsty, and nothing in this world seems to satisfy me.

And yet I have loved you, Lord,  
I’ve worked for you; gave my whole life to you, followed your voice in the night, from the earliest days of my youth.  
O great and terrible God, what more do you want?  
Why won’t you leave me in peace?

* * * * *

My son, I want more for you and the world, until now, you have planned your actions, but I have no need of them.  
You have asked for my approval.  
You have asked for my support.  
You have wanted to interest me in your work.

But do you not see, that you were reversing the roles?  
I have watched you, I have seen your good will.  
And I want more than you, now.  
You will no longer do your own works, but the will of the one who has called you, who has whispered to you on that night, when you were merely a child.

Say “yes”, son.  
I need your “yes” as I needed Mary’s, to come to earth.  
For it is I who must do your work.  
It is I who must live in your family, not you.  
It is I who must be in those whose lives you touch, not you.  
It is I whose words they must hear, not yours.  
It is I whose eyes they must look into, not yours.  
It is my Word that carries weight, not yours.  
It is my Life that transforms, not yours.

Give all to me, abandon all to me.  
I need your “yes” to be united with you, and to come down to earth.  
I need your “yes” to continue saving the world.

O Lord, I am afraid of your demands.  
But who can resist you?  
That your Kingdom may come, and not mine.  
That your Will may be done, and not mine.  
Help me to say “yes”.

* * * * *
Prayer by Thomas Merton

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone."

Prayers of Ted Loder

“O Holy one, I hear and say so many words, yet yours is the word I need. Speak now, and help me listen; and, if what I hear is silence, let it quiet me, let it disturb me, let it touch my need, let it break my pride, let it shrink my certainties, let it enlarge my wonder.”

“Lord, I have so few ways to pray, but you have so many ways to answer. Keep me alert to your unpredictable answers, to your unexplainable surprises, and by your grace, make me one of those surprises of moving mountains, healing touches, wondrous stories, great banquets, first suppers, broken bread, crosses and resurrections.”

Thanksgiving Prayer by Walter Brueggemann:
The witnesses tell of your boundless generosity, and their telling is compelling to us:
You give your word to call the worlds into being;
You give your sovereign rule to emancipate the slaves and the oppressed;
You give your commanding fidelity to form your own people;
You give your life for the life of the world...
broken bread that feeds,
poured out wine and binds and heals.
You give...we receive...and are thankful.

We begin this day in gratitude,
thanks that is a match for your self-giving,
gratitude in gifts offered,
gratitude in tales told,
gratitude in lives lived.

Gratitude willed, but no so readily lived,
held back by old wounds turned to powerful resentment,
slowed by early fears become vague anxiety,
restrained by self-sufficiency in a can-do arrogance,
blocked by amnesia unable to recall gifts any longer.

Do this yet. Create innocent spaces for us this day for the gratitude we intend.

In thankfulness,
we will give,
we will tell,
we will live,
your gift through us to gift the world. Amen”

A Prayer by Henri Nouwen

“Dear Lord…
You have sent me into this world to preach your word. So often the problems of the world seem so complex and intricate that your word strikes me as embarrassingly simple. Many times I feel tongue-tied in the company of people who are dealing with the world’s social and economic problems.

But you, O Lord, said, ‘Be clever as serpents and innocent as doves.’ Let me retain innocence and simplicity in the midst of this complex world. I realize that I have to be informed, that I have to study the many aspects of the problems facing the world, and that I have to try to understand as well as possible the dynamics of contemporary society. But what really counts is that all this information, knowledge and insight allow me to speak more clearly and unambiguously your truthful word. Do not allow evil powers to seduce me with the complexities of the world’s problems, but give me the strength to think clearly, speak freely, and act boldly in your service.
Give me the courage to show the dove in a world so full of serpents. Amen.”
Personal Prayer Labyrinth

The Christian life is a journey and pilgrimage. A prayer labyrinth is a reflection of this journey as it moves us through many twists and turns as we journey towards the center. It reminds us should strive to make Christ the center of our lives. In the labyrinth, we move inward and outward reflecting an inward transformation that manifests itself in outward action that brings transformation in the world.

If you can’t make it to a walkable prayer labyrinth, use the following practice as one you can print out and do on your own to uplift many prayers to God.

Google and print out a blank labyrinth on an 8X11 paper. As you journey through the labyrinth in prayer, write down your many prayers: write down words, phrases, situations, organizations, friends, family, your needs, situations in the world, countries, things on your heart, your desires for faithfulness, etc... Use different colors to represent different emotions, insights, and thoughts. (See picture above)

This is a powerful and simple way to be in prayer for many people and situations.

Transforming Bible Study

This half page comes from the book Transforming Bible Study by Walter Wink. It offers questions for biblical texts that will invite you to see the texts in deep and profound ways. This book also explores biblical engagement through engaging the more creative, right side of the brain.

Read Mark 2:13-17
1) Who were tax collectors? Why were they untrustworthy? Who would have been included in the term ‘sinners’?
2) Why did the religious authorities not eat with the sinners? What does eating together imply? What is the psychological basis for the fear of defilement?
3) Why does Jesus associate with such people?
4) Why don’t we?
5) One of the most radical aspects of Jesus’ ministry was his association with the marginalized and outcast. Who are these people in our society today? Why are we afraid to associate with them? How might they ‘defile’ us? How might we relate to them?
6) Can you get in touch with ‘the sinner,’ ‘the tax collector,’ the ‘defiled’ part of you? What keeps it from “coming to the table?”
7) Can you get in touch with the ‘Pharisee’ in you? How does it feel about the defiled part of you? How does it treat it? What kinds of things does it say?
8) What in Jesus allowed him to associate with sinners?
9) Write a dialogue between your own inner sinner and your inner Pharisee. At some point have Jesus enter the conversation and invite your sinner-part to break bread with him. Record the dialogue. See if you can get your Pharisee to sit at the table too.
Read Luke 13:10-17
1) If you are in a group setting, have half of the group walk around bent over for 5 minutes, and the other half walking straight and upwards. Have the half walking straight talk to the ones walking bent over. Then reverse. See how it felt
2) What would it have been like to have this for 18 years? How was her problem diagnosed by her contemporaries? By Jesus?
3) How is she healed? In healing her, what social conventions did Jesus break?
4) Why does she praise God, not Jesus? How does healing take place and what is our role in it?
5) Often when Jesus healed people it was also an act of restoring them back into the fullness of the community. How does that shape our understanding of working for healing in today’s world?
6) Why does Jesus say “hypocrites” when only the ruler of the synagogue has spoken?
7) Does Jesus’ argument really speak to the objection? Why does the law make exception for animals but not for people (Deut 5:14)? What will become of the Sabbath if human needs are individualized like this?
8) In what ways do contemporary women feel bent over? Men?
9) Under what burden have you been bent for all these years? What is the “spirit of weakness” in you? Write about it for a few minutes
10) What is the strength hidden in your weakness?

The Lost Coin Luke 15:8-9
1) What is symbolized by the lost coin? The dark house? The lamp? What seems to you to be the meaning of the parable?
2) Write on a piece of paper: What have I lost? (Or, What is the coin in me?)
3) What would it mean for me to light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until I find it?

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl - Matt 13:44-46
1) Why is the treasure hidden in the field? How does the man discover it? Is the owner of the treasure still alive? Why doesn’t the man just take it? What would happen if he suddenly started spending it? What would he have to sell?
2) “In his joy” - can you get into his feeling? Is “selling all” a sacrifice? Why is God’s reign like this? What does it mean to sell all? What would it mean for you to sell all?
3) The Pearl: What do pearls symbolize? Where do they come from? What for you is the Pearl for which you could sell? Why is God’s reign like this story?
4) List on paper the things you would most hate to give up. Then ask out of what “sheer joy” you could gladly relinquish which things on your list. Which could you not? Then ask what “selling all” means in reference to your list.

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9) Under what burden have you been bent for all these years? What is the “spirit of weakness” in you? Write about it for a few minutes
10) What is the strength hidden in your weakness?
O Lord, let my soul rise up to meet you
as the day rises to meet the sun
Glory to the father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in
the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Come, let us bow down and bend the knee: let us kneel before the Lord
our Maker

Song “Guide My Feet”

Lead us by your light, O Lord: that we might shine like the sun.
Psalm 43:1-4
Give judgment for me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly
people: deliver me from the deceitful and the wicked.

For you are the God of my strength, why have you put me from you? And
why do I go so heavily while the enemy oppresses me?
Send out your light and your truth, that they may lead me and bring me
to your holy hill and to your dwelling;
That I may go to the altar of God, to the God of my joy and gladness and
on the harp I will give my thanks to you, O God my God

Lead us by your light, O Lord that we might shine like the sun

Genesis 47:1-26 Mark 3:19b-35
Lead us by your light, O Lord that we might shine like the sun

Maria Skobstova, a 20th century nun remembered in Russia as Mother
Maria, said “I am your message, Lord. Throw me like a blazing torch into
the night, that all may see and understand what it means to be a
disciple.”

Prayers for Others
Our Father

Lord God, when the hungry are fed, the sick healed, the lonely made
family, the outcast brought in, the sinner forgiven, the tyrant
transformed, and the enemy reconciled, we know your work by the fruit it
produces. May our lives bear fruit worthy of your name. Amen.

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever he may send
you; may he guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the
storm; may he bring you home rejoicing at the wonders he has shown
you; may he bring you home rejoicing one again into our doors.