



Living the Questions: Theme Packet

Each month, our church gathers around a common theme and practice to guide our reflection in worship, education, justice and small groups. This packet provides questions and excerpts to guide personal or group writing or discussion, and serves as the guide for our monthly Sharing Circles. For more info. contact

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Prayer: the practice of staying awake January, 2014

QUESTIONS

Do you pray, and if so, why? If not, why?
What different forms can prayer take?
How has prayer affected your life?
What helps you “stay awake” and be present to yourself and the world?

QUOTES

The result of prayer is life; prayer irrigates the earth and heart.

- St. Francis of Assisi

"Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer."

- Simone Weil

If the only prayer you said was *thank you*, that would be enough.

- Meister Eckhart

"Are you a God?" they asked the Buddha.

"No," he replied.

"Are you an angel, then?"

"No."

"A saint?"

"No."

"Then what are you?"

Replied the Buddha: "I am awake."

POETRY/LYRICS

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

- Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*

Deep Peace

of the running wave to you Deep Peace

of the flowing air to you

Deep Peace

of the quiet earth to you Deep Peace

of the shining stars to you Deep Peace

of the gentle night to you Moon and stars

pour their healing light on you Deep Peace to you

- Gaelic Blessing

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me

sow love; where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;
O Divine Spirit grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to
console; to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

- Prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, it is night. The night is for Stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.
It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done.
What has not been done has not been done. Let it be.
The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives rest in you.
The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us.
All dear to us.
And all who have no peace.
The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day, New joys, New possibilities.
In your name we pray.
Amen.

- From New Zealand Book of Common Prayer

READINGS & EXCERPTS

During the moment of silence in our Sunday service I close my eyes and sing, silently, inside my head, "Guide my feet while I run this race for I don't want to run this race in vain." As I sing in silence, I imagine myself and the congregation enfolded in arms of love.

At a hospital bedside I hold the hand of a dying woman. The words form in my mind—or perhaps in my heart—"Goddess, be with her, give her strength and courage and comfort for this journey."

The full autumn moon rises, huge and orange and glowing, and I feel my spirit lifting along with it. "Thank you," I say. "Thank you." In the moment of beauty it doesn't matter whom I am thanking or even whether I am heard. It is enough to be grateful and to be a witness to wonder.

- Daniel Budd

In a desperate moment, I cried out for help, and I was answered. Some years later I am still a humanist—I believe that religion is about this world, about bringing justice and mercy and the power of love into life here and now. Yet I am a humanist who prays, who begins each morning with devotional readings and a time of silence and prayer.

Why do I do this?

I need a quiet time.

I need to express my gratitude.

I need humility.

I pray because—alone—I am not enough and also I am too much.

I express gratitude for the gift of aliveness.

I assert my oneness with you and all humankind and all creation.

When I pray, I acknowledge that God is not me.

- Lynn Ungar

Getting the words right should never be an overriding concern. It is, rather, the attitude one brings to prayer – the honesty and authenticity, the openness and vulnerability, the courage and commitment. Notice those places in your life where you have felt yourself in the presence of the Holy, heard your connectedness, your own feelings where you have encountered or are encountering the Sacred.

In other words, simply pray. Pray without any preconceived notion of what you're doing or why. Simply do it, and see what happens.

- Erik Walker Wikstrom, UU Minister, *Simply Pray*

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