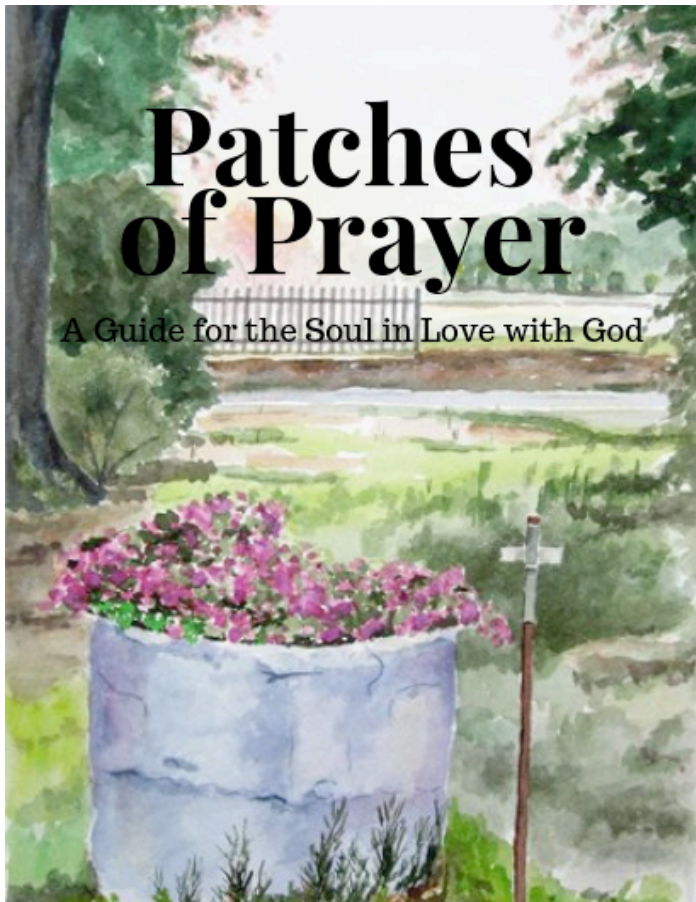


Patches of Prayer

A Guide for the Soul in Love with God



Patches of Prayer

Prayer stands as one of the great gifts and practices of the faithful. Mother Teresa says of prayer:

“Prayer is as necessary as the air, as the blood in our bodies, as anything to keep us alive - to keep us alive to the grace of God.”

So together, let us set off to recognize and nurture the Patches of Prayer in our own lives. The word patch denotes several meanings:

- a place where something or someone can grow and flourish*
- something that holds that which is fraying together*
- an act of beginning to mend that which has come apart*

This 12-week prayer guide leads you by intentionally inviting you inward, outward and into community. Each week a directed prayer session awaits so that together we might discover God anew in the community we call the South Georgia Annual Conference. You may pray with each session once or revisit throughout the assigned week.

As you pray, know that you never pray alone. So many others will be lifting their hearts and yielding their souls in prayer alongside you. May our all loving, all powerful God transform us through the offering of our prayers.

From the Bishop

My question for us is this: how can we be fully open to God's will? As John Wesley knew so well, spiritual disciplines are essential to being open to God. These practices bring us to a state of openness to all that God has for us. Through these practices we can experience the fulfillment of Jesus' teaching in John 15, "Abide in me, as I abide in you. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit..."

This time leading up to Annual Conference encompasses two highly significant seasons of the Christian year: the season of Lent and the season of Easter. Lent is the 40-day season of self-examination in preparation for the celebration of the Resurrection. During the 40 days following that - beginning on Easter Sunday and extending to the Ascension of Jesus - the Resurrected Jesus revealed himself to his followers. Annual Conference begins on Ascension Sunday. Then, the Sunday after Annual Conference is Pentecost Sunday, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers gathered in Jerusalem and the Church was born. What a significant time to be seeking to discern God's will for us!

Using this guide will prepare us spiritually for an Annual Conference session that is fully open to God. I encourage us all to use it personally and with the classes, groups, councils, and boards in our local churches. Let us journey inward, journey outward, and journey into community. What a powerful way to be Alive Together in Christ!

R. Lawson Bryan



Artwork by Margaret Mathews
“Moving Inward” written by Rev. Teresa Edwards

Patches of Prayer

Patch: a place where something
can grow and flourish

Moving Inward

Breathe deep

Listen deep

Hold deep

Embrace deep

*“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in
the hands of God, at his disposition, and listening
to his voice in the depths of our hearts.”*

Mother Teresa

Week 1: Breathe Deep

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable spot for prayer. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distractions. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. The breath you are taking is a gift of God. Savor it and become present to this sacred time of tending your patch of prayer.

Read John 20:19-22

Notice that Jesus breathes on the disciples to impart the Holy Spirit upon them and into them. The Holy Spirit is literally connected to our breath. How is the Spirit breathing in you in this moment?

Invitation to Prayer

Read John 20:19-22 once more.

Adopt the following breath prayer:

Guide me (on the inhale)
Holy Spirit (on the exhale)

Practice this prayer for several minutes.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

*“Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.”*

Edwin Hatch

Week 2: Listen Deep

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable spot for prayer. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distractions. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the silence. This time of quiet is a gift from God. Savor it and become present to this sacred time of tending your patch of prayer.

Read I Kings 19:11-12

Elijah comes to this moment in a state of despair. His life is at stake. Earthquake and fire seem right in such a moment. Yet God speaks in the sound of sheer silence. Reflect on a time God spoke into your need through silence.

Invitation to Prayer

Read I Kings 19:11-12 once more.

Ask God to speak over your soul in this time of sheer silence. Breathe and listen deeply.

Practice this prayer for several minutes.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

*“I offer you the silence of this night (or day).
Take what you ask of me
and what I alone can offer you:
a life lived responding to your grace...”*

Francis de Sales

Week 3: Hold Deep

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable spot for prayer. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distractions. Simply breathe in and out, placing your hands in your lap, palms open. Your hands hold this time of prayer and gift. Savor these moments and become present to this sacred time of tending your patch of prayer.

Read Colossians 1:17-20

Jesus Christ existed before all things and holds all things together. Jesus came to hold our hands as we walk this earth and to hold all things together, now and forever, with his powerful hand. Think for a moment about a Savior who holds your hand and the whole world, too.

Invitation to Prayer

Read Colossians 1:17-20 once more.

Gaze at your hands. Imagine Christ taking your hand in his and holding your hand with love and care.

Practice this prayer for several minutes.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

*“For all the things my hands have held,
the best by far is you.”*

-unknown

Week 4: Embrace Deep

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable spot for prayer. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distractions. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. As you sit, pay attention to your body. Allow yourself to be embraced by this sacred time. Savor it and become present to this time of tending your patch of prayer.

Read Luke 15:20

To embrace is more than a polite hug or greeting. To be embraced feels like coming home to a place we never even knew existed before that moment. The good father embraces the prodigal son in such a way, anxious for their reunion. Hold in prayer someone you would like to embrace in this way.

Invitation to Prayer

Read Luke 15:20 once more.

In your mind's eye, see Jesus approaching you and embracing you with love.

Practice this prayer for several minutes.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“I will arise and go to Jesus, he will embrace me in his arms. In the arms of my dear savior, oh there are ten thousand charms.”

Joseph Hart



Artwork by Margaret Mathews
“Moving Outward” written by Rev. Meg Procopio

Patches of Prayer

Patch: something that holds together
that which is fraying

Moving Outward

See with open eyes

Extend with an open hand

Share with an open heart

Connect with an open spirit

“Sharing our lives with others is always a risk. Authenticity, interdependence and being known come with a cost. But the alternative to paying the cost of living a one-another life is to live cut off from God...By appropriately opening ourselves to each other in the presence of Christ...we learn how to become safe people who bring God’s welcoming embrace to others.”

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

Week 5: See With Open Eyes

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable place to pray. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distraction. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. Close your eyes for a moment. Ask God to open your eyes to the holy gift of both Presence and Love all around you as you pray.

Read Ephesians 1:18

In Ephesians, Paul prays that we might know the hope to which God has called us. “Hope” is so often misunderstood. For some, hope indicates a lack of certainty. Often, hope is mistaken for wishful thinking. At other times, hope is confused with having a glass-half-full kind of attitude. But hope, in the theological sense of the word, is not any of these things. Paul flourished in hope. Hebrews says that hope is being sure and certain of what we cannot see. For many, hope is the virtue that orders our actions. As Methodists, we simply sing that hope is the blessed assurance that Jesus is ours, a foretaste of glory divine.

For Paul, hope is what keeps him engaged in the good fight. Hope is what keeps him connected and faithful even in prison. As diverting as it might sound, God called the community at Ephesus to be a sign of hope, of what was truly possible. God called this hope-filled community to be a sacrament of Christ's work for radical reconciliation.

Invitation to Pray

Sit in silence for a few minutes.

Reflect on the ways the church offers hope to the community around us.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

"Hope is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous. A spark is just fine as long as it's contained."

Robert Ludlum

Week 6: Extend with an Open Hand

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable place to pray. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distraction. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. Place your hands in your lap. Turn your palms upward as a sign of both offering and receiving in this time of prayer.

Read Luke 6:38

Symbols guide our lives & point us beyond the obvious signs. An open hand assumes the posture of availability & the readiness to receive. Open hands indicate interest to a person or task. A closed hand sends the message of inconvenience and inaccessibility. When our hands are full we convey preoccupation or even self-absorption. Clenched fists may convey indifference or even dismay. It is important that we have open hands to give but also to receive. Sometimes, it may be difficult to receive from others because of self reliance or even arrogance. It takes humility to accept assistance from those who are willing to offer it.

Invitation to Pray

Pray with this verse; read it slowly, carefully. What words resonate with you? Good? Measure? Running over? To give means we are releasing what is in our possession. If all is held loosely, with open hands, then we are free to release what is no longer needed. In our lives, we too are invited to release the things...pain, thoughts, experiences that no longer serve us, even people we once held as ours.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“I believe this is just what God is hoping for: our being with God consciously just as we are with no censorship, no cleaning up our act, no posturing-just being real.”

Gerald May

Week 7: Share with an Open Heart

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable place to pray. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distraction. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. Now move your attention to your heart. Feel its beating inside of you. This heart that beats is a gift from God. Open it to the spirit in this time of prayer.

Read 1 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

The aim of our charge is love that comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. God continues to surprise us with what obedience-as-love looks like. How do we recognize this holy charge? It always comes down to love. We ask ourselves: what is the loving thing to do? Love is about obedience, obedience is about love, and God often surprises us with response, saying this is the easy part; it's living it out that will take everything we've got.

Invitation to Pray

Pray with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Every time the word LOVE appears, insert your name with the question, “is this true?”

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...”

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

*“Prayer does not change God,
but it changes the one who prays.”*

Soren Kierkegaard

Week 8: Connect with an Open Spirit

Guiding Word

Take a moment to find a suitable place to pray. Move into a comfortable seated position away from distraction. Simply breathe in and out, paying attention to the flow of your breath. Our spirits open the door to life with Christ. God yearns to draw close to you now. Allow that soul door to open to God in this time of prayer.

Read Corinthians 5:16-18

When a person is in Christ, no longer do we take pleasure in counting the sins of other people. When we are in Christ, these former things have passed away. There is a changed person inside of us even though our personality has not been altered. There are new things happening inside of us. When a person is in Christ and is a new person, they are entrusted with God's message of reconciliation.

Invitation to Pray

Sit in silence with these thoughts:

- Who am I in Christ?
- What would reconciliation look like for me?
- What needs to be released or embraced to become new?

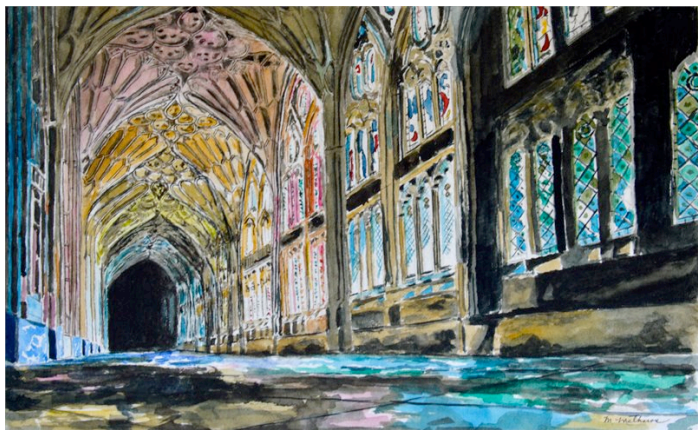
What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

God is powerful enough not only to reconcile but also to transform us into “the righteousness of God.”

“When we pray, we stop trying to control life and remember that we belong to life. Prayer is a movement from mystery to mystery.”

Rachel Naomi Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom



Artwork by Margaret Mathews

“Moving in Community” written by Rev. Josh Bizzell

Patches of Prayer

Patch: the act of beginning to mend
that which has come apart

Moving in Community

Welcome God

Worship God

Center in God

Serve God

“Community is like a large mosaic. Each little piece seems so insignificant...When, however, all these little stones are brought together in one big mosaic portraying the face of Christ, who would ever question the importance of any one of them?”

Henri Nouwen

Week 9: Welcome God

Guiding Word

Begin by stilling yourself, finding a comfortable place and posture for prayer. Breathe in deeply through your nose, taking in the presence of God's Spirit and letting the Spirit fill you. Breathe out deeply through your mouth, releasing all of the confusion or preoccupations of your soul. As you continue to breathe deeply, pray silently to God: "God and Creator of my soul, center my whole self upon you."

Read Genesis 18:1-15

Notice that sometimes God comes unannounced. Even so, God brings favor and promise while the world offers only confusion and division. God's blessings might surprise us or seem too wondrous, but if we welcome God with openness who knows what God might do!

Invitation to Pray

Let us pray with our imagination. Imagine that God is coming to your house. What do you do to prepare?

God knocks on the door and you open it. What words or signs of greeting do you exchange? Whom do you invite over to share in this intimate gathering with God? What do you discuss as you settle in?

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy.”

Henri Nouwen

Week 10: Worship God

Guiding Word

Begin by stilling yourself, finding a comfortable place and posture for prayer. Breathe in deeply through your nose, taking in the presence of God's Spirit and letting the Spirit fill you. Breathe out deeply through your mouth, releasing all of the confusion or preoccupations of your soul. As you continue to breathe deeply, pray silently to God: "God and Creator of my soul, center my whole self upon you."

Read Mark 14:3-9

Extravagant love – this is what we express to God in worship. We each bring a personal expression of love, and together they weave a splendid tapestry of witness to God's work in the community. Each tells how God has transformed us and, in the process, we are transformed together. What gift of extravagance will you lavish upon God? How will you join it with the other offerings of the redeemed?

Invitation to Pray

Pray through an act of creativity. Express your love for God in a poem, a song, a work of art, or through whatever means express the depths of your soul. Share it with a fellow believer.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“I think the only pure worship of God is by loving one another...”

Charles Schultz

Week 11: Center in God

Guiding Word

Begin by stilling yourself, finding a comfortable place and posture for prayer. Breathe in deeply through your nose, taking in the presence of God's Spirit and letting the Spirit fill you. Breathe out deeply through your mouth, releasing all of the confusion or preoccupations of your soul. As you continue to breathe deeply, pray silently to God: "God and Creator of my soul, center my whole self upon you."

Read Psalm 1

I have often used the image of the bird in the tree to symbolize the spiritual life in Christ. We must be free to fly into the worlds to which the Spirit leads us. Yet we must always begin and end our day grounded in the tree deeply rooted in God's being. How might we be planted more firmly in God together?

Invitation to Pray

Picture yourself standing tall beside a living stream. Speak the centering word "Jesus" with each cycle of breath. As you speak his holy name, watch as your

roots grow longer until they reach the stream and you drink fully from the refreshing waters. Notice how you are one of many trees, growing together in God's forest.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“Deep roots are not reached by the frost.”

J. R. R. Tolkien

Week 12: Serve God

Guiding Word

Begin by stilling yourself, finding a comfortable place and posture for prayer. Breathe in deeply through your nose, taking in the presence of God's Spirit and letting the Spirit fill you. Breathe out deeply through your mouth, releasing all of the confusion or preoccupations of your soul. As you continue to breathe deeply, pray silently to God: "God and Creator of my soul, center my whole self upon you."

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

I have often desired the talents necessary to compose music on the piano or to build a beautiful building. How splendidly I could use those gifts to serve God's Kingdom! Yet, God has called us each to our own unique, indispensable role within the Kingdom. Just as important, God has called us to recognize the unique manifestations of Christ in the *other*. How is God working through you? How do you need the gifts of others?

Invitation to Pray

You will encounter many people this week. Imagine a flame of Holy Spirit fire resting upon the head of each and every person you encounter. Ask God to reveal to them their giftedness and their place in the Kingdom.

What Am I Hearing?

Pray These Words

“Go to serve God and your neighbor in all that you do. Bear witness to the love of God in this world, so that those to whom love is a stranger will find in you generous friends.”

A Service of Christian Marriage I



ALIVE
together in the
WORLD

Carrying Our Prayers Forward

As these twelve weeks of prayer draw to a close, carry your prayers forward as we come together for the South Georgia Annual Conference, June 2-5, 2019, in Columbus, Ga.

May the prayers of the people build up the church among us, a church which proclaims the gospel and brings forth love in the name of Jesus Christ.

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The *South
Georgia*

 Conference
of The
United Methodist
Church