

**Instructions:**

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



**Series: Connections, the Pathways to God**

Life is busy, full, uncertain, and stressful. Some seasons are so overwhelming that we are left feeling tired, fragmented, disconnected, with little energy left to give toward our own spiritual lives. In these wild times, how can we breathe deeply and feel rejuvenated? How can we become more aware of the presence of God that is, supposedly, always with us? Join us as we revisit practices that help us remain connected to God and to one another; the tried-and-true practices of the faith that keep us tethered and grounded during chaotic times.

**Message description**

Contemplative prayer is an ancient Christian practice used by mystics, monks, and throughout wider wisdom traditions that seeks the divine presence of God in all things. It is a particular way to pray that invites the participant to make room for Jesus by practicing detachment, remembering who we are, and noticing the presence of God in small and big ways. Contemplative prayer is one means of experiencing a peace that surpasses all understanding as we seek to abide with Christ. For it is Jesus Christ after all, who teaches us how to pray, and how to remain connected to God, the Father.

**Key Scriptures**

*Philippians 4:4-9, Romans 12:1-2*

**Special Events coming up:**

- October 24, phone a friend throughout the week!
- October 30, REVAPALOOZA live music, chili cook-off, pumpkin painting, and games! 3-5pm
- October 31, All Saints Celebration at 10am

**Additional sources for independent study:**

- *The Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper
- *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Common Rule* by Justin Earley
- *Overflow* by Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin
- <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/how-to-foster-spiritual-disciplines-in-the-church>
- John Wesley sermon on "The Means of Grace" - <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/>

### **Questions Related to This Week's Message:**

1. How would you describe your prayer life right now?
2. Is prayer something that is helping you feel connected to God in this season?
3. Have you ever heard of contemplative prayer or practiced it yourself? What excites you about this type of prayer practice? What makes you nervous?
4. What questions do you still have about it?

### **Going Deeper:**

#### **On Philippians 4:4-9**

1. Verse 4 begins, "Rejoice in the Lord always!" What difference does it make to begin our prayers with rejoicing? Do you think it is necessary or helpful to begin this way in prayer in every season?
2. Philippians is often referred to as the book of joy because Paul crams so much wisdom in four short chapters on the power of joy that comes from living new life in Christ. And yet, Paul was in prison at the time of this letter to the believers in Philippi.
  - How does the passage on rejoicing, praying, and meditating hit differently knowing that Paul was in chains when he wrote these words?
  - How do you imagine that Paul was able to think about "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, whatever is excellent"- or what difference do you think this thought exercise made for Paul?
3. What does Paul mean by "do not be anxious about anything"? Is this even possible for us to do today?
4. What are you most anxious about right now? Where do you see God at work in that situation? How can we help you pray through it?

#### **The example of Jesus:**

For other examples of when Jesus withdrew to pray, consider reading Luke 4:1-15, Mark 6:30-32, Matthew 14:1-13, Luke 22:39-44, or Luke 5:16.

- What purpose did each time of solitude and prayer offer Jesus?
- What can we learn from his example?
- Do you find solitude easy or difficult to practice in this season?
- [Read <https://toeverynation.com/6-times-when-jesus-chose-solitude-over-people/> for a short article on this topic.]

#### **Prayer exercise:**

**Practice a breath prayer together based on Psalm 46:10 as a starter to contemplative prayer.**

1. Start with a few deep breaths and silence.
2. Have one leader read the verse from Psalms, shortening it by one word each time it is read. Pause between each reading for reflection, breath, and prayer. End with silence.

"Be still and know that I am God."

"Be still and know that I am..."

"Be still and know that I..."

"Be still and know that..."

"Be still and know..."

"Be still and..."

"Be still..."

"Be..."

3. To be lead in a pre-recorded breath prayer based on Psalm 46:10, consider:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfNITYx0bXI>

**Family-Related Questions:**

- When do you pray together as a family?
- Is prayer something your kids are comfortable doing in front of others, why or why not?
- How can contemplative prayer, or other creative prayer options [prayer walk, journaling, utilizing music for reflection, breath prayers, etc.], free your kids from the pressure or guilt that praying must look like one thing?
- Pick an unusual prayer practice for you and consider doing it with your kids this week!