

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:

All Saints' Day is an opportunity for us to celebrate the saints who have gone before us in faith. Their witness and stories in different times and places remind us that we are not alone and give us the courage we need to keep following Jesus in our own time. And they also remind us that we too can be called *sanctus*- holy, set apart, saint. Recognizing the communion of saints, both living and dead, during Allhallowtide challenges us to consider how we can live as saints now and how we intend to pass on the faith to future generations of Christ-followers.

Key Scriptures

Matthew 5:1-11, Philippians 2:1-11

Additional sources for independent study:

- *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Common Rule* by Justin Earley
- <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. Had you ever heard of Allhallowtide before Sunday's teaching? What did you learn about All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Day, and/or All Souls' Day?
2. Do you have a favorite saint within Church tradition? What about their story and witness gives you hope for today?
3. Name one person (living or dead, personally known) whose life of faith you are grateful for and whose witness still informs your faith today.

4. Do you expect to be made holy in this life? Or, as asked within the tradition of the ordination service of the UMC; are you going on toward perfection? Does anything about this question challenge you or make you uncomfortable?

Going Deeper:

1. #Blessed

- What are the first things that come to mind when you think about a “blessed” life?
- Is that picture informed more by a cultural interpretation of “blessed” or by scripture?

The prosperity gospel is a false alternate gospel that is pervasive in the American religious psyche today. It is a combination of sorts between the gospel and the American dream, where believers can be blessed with health, wealth, and happiness (prosperity) if only they ascribe to a certain type of faith (belief in the power of positive thinking, praying harder, etc.). Within this model, there is little room for a suffering Savior who offers hope in times of our own suffering through the presence of Christ with us. Pain, illness, or suffering in this model are wrongly indicative of a failure of faith. To read more about the prosperity gospel, consider: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/14/opinion/sunday/death-the-prosperity-gospel-and-me.html>

2. Read Matthew 5:1-11

The Greek word Jesus uses for “blessed” in Matthew 5 is *makarios*, which means blessed, fortunate, happy, or privileged. Replace the word “blessed” with “happy” and reread the passage Matthew 5:1-11.

- How does this impact your reading or interpretation? How does this idea of happiness challenge or differ from a cultural definition of happiness?
- The Sermon on the Mount follows the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry in chapter 4 where he is tempted in the desert and then begins teaching on the kingdom of heaven. Jesus presents an upside-down sort of life where those who are poor, persecuted, or meek receive blessing. What is the source of the blessing in Matthew 5? Is this a blessing only for the future or can it be experienced in the present as well?

3. Read Philippians 2:1-11

- Jesus shows us the way to the “blessed life,” a holy life, not by reaching for power, fame, and glory, but by emptying himself to the point of death, even death on a cross. The saints are those who understand this self-emptying way of Jesus, who take up their crosses and follow him. According to this passage, how can we have “the same mind of Christ”?
- Blessing comes through sacrifice, which is not just a future hope, but a present reality. We experience blessing and sanctification when we live according to kingdom values now. When have you experienced such a blessing through personal sacrifice, service, or putting the needs of someone else ahead of your own? Did you see these moments as sanctification for you?

Family-Oriented Questions:

Consider talking to your kids about the Christian roots of Halloween. For a quick and helpful guide, check-out https://www.instagram.com/p/CV1KmtWr7y1/?utm_medium=copy_link. Ask your kids if there is someone from history whom they admire? Or, if they could dress up as anyone from history, who would it be and why?

To learn more about the saints together, check-out Catholic Saint of the Day:

https://mycatholic.life/saints/saints-of-the-liturgical-year/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwt-6LBhDIARIsAIPRQcKU2Zrdr-ZRieloRk9wHP4HJnoBd1iiQP5_9aOEBJZwlI4nUAXISAYaAoQBEALw_wcB