SETTLING IN

Preparing for prayer is an important step to meaningful communication with our heavenly Father. It is easy to be distracted by so many things like noises, personal discomfort with where or how we're sitting, the temperature of the room, or tiredness. With little effort, either exhaustion or the events of our lives barge in on our ability to concentrate. We are unable to listen for God speaking to us and unable to speak to him. But take heart that even Jesus’ closest followers had this problem.

The disciples had trouble staying alert to pray with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus told them, "Pray that you will not be overcome by temptation." A short time later when he returned to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from grief. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked. "Get up and pray. Otherwise temptation will over power you." (You may want to read Matthew 26:36-45)

Spend a couple minutes focusing your thoughts on God. First take a couple of deep cleansing breaths and relax any tense muscles.
Are there still thoughts that are clamoring for your attention? If so, write down all the things that might distract you in this time of prayer.

Now give these distractions over to God by praying:

Gracious Lord, help me to release these concerns into your care for the next hour so I can fully enjoy this time in your presence. Enable me to concentrate on our conversation - what you have to say to me and on the things I need to say to you. Amen.
PRAYING FOR SELF AND OTHERS

Bring your concerns to the attention of your Savior who died for you.

- The needs of your family. Include your spouse, each of your children, grandchildren, your parents, brothers and sisters, your nieces and nephews, cousins etc. Include a specific request for each person.
- The needs of your friends and neighbors. List them by name and include specific requests for each.
- The needs of your coworkers, those who work with you, those for whom you are responsible, those to whom you report, etc.
- Our communities, states, nation and world reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Pray for the President, Congress, our state Governors and Mayors striving to do the right thing as they try to lead in a very difficult time.
- Doctors, nurses, first responders and all health professionals who are striving to care for the sick and dying sometimes without the needed equipment, fearing for their own health and the health of their family.
- The elderly, those whose bodies are already compromised, those who have been exposed to the virus.
- Youth and children, the most vulnerable among us. Pray for the spiritual growth, safety and well-being of the children and youth in our faith community.
- Those who are hungry every day.
- Those who are grieving.
- Those who suffer from depression, isolation, mental illness.
- Those in financial hardship because of missed work, layoffs, unemployment.
- Teachers and students without closure of the semester.
- The staff, council, programs and missions of Sheridan Lutheran Church. Pray that Sheridan is faithful to God’s call to preach and teach the Good News of Jesus Christ and those that hear will grow ever deeper in faith, hope and love.
- The healing of our environment, God’s creation.
- Pray for those praying at this hour with you.
- Pray for those who are still waiting to hear the Good News as well as those who are wavering in their faith.
- Your own needs. Ask for help to overcome your fears, the sins you struggle with, for help in loving those who are unloving to you, for help in living out the Spirit’s gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control in your life.
SLOWLY READ these timely words of Psalm 91.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.
Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,
no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.
For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.
Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Read this Psalm again, stopping to reflect over the words in each sentence. What words, phrases or sentences catch your attention?

Ask yourself:
What does this phrase tell me about my God?
What do these words tell me about myself?
What does it tell me about my response to God?
What does the psalmist pray for that I also want to pray for?
ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING  Reflect on the words of this ancient hymn written by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1153:

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners’ gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! ’Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

Men mock and taunt and jeer Thee, Thou noble countenance,
Though mighty worlds shall fear Thee and flee before Thy glance.
How art thou pale with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn!
How doth Thy visage languish that once was bright as morn!

My burden in Thy Passion, Lord, Thou hast borne for me,
For it was my transgression, which brought this woe on Thee.
I cast me down before Thee, wrath were my rightful lot;
Have mercy, I implore Thee; Redeemer, spurn me not!

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.

My Savior, be Thou near me when death is at my door;
Then let Thy presence cheer me, forsake me nevermore!
When soul and body languish, oh, leave me not alone,
But take away mine anguish by virtue of Thine own!

Be Thou my consolation, my shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion when my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfolds Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.

Read through it again noting all the names and adjectives describing Jesus.
What are some key things you want to thank Jesus for?
How do these sacred moments of prayer and reflection strengthen your faith in the days ahead?
Pray for a stronger faith, more passionate love, and courage to live in the way of Jesus.

Almighty and everlasting God, who willed that our Savior should suffer death upon the Cross, mercifully grant that I may both follow the example of His sacrifice and also be made a partaker of His resurrection, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
LINGERING IN THE WORD


As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong. "Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds, who had gathered there for this spectacle, saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

How are you feeling about the sacrifice and suffering of Jesus after reading this? Bring these thoughts and feelings to Jesus in prayer.
Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love. John 13:1

O God, you sent Christ Jesus to be my shepherd and the lamb of sacrifice. Help me to embrace the mystery of salvation, the promise of life rising out of death. Help me to hear the call of Christ and give me courage to follow it readily, that I, too, may lead others to you. This I ask through Jesus, my shepherd and guide. Amen.

PONDER THESE WORDS OF PHILIPPIANS 2

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one inspirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

How can you imitate Christ Jesus in your life?
How would you have to change?
What would these changes mean for those closest to you?

Commit your resolve on this holy night to God in prayer.

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord’s resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

1. When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

3. See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.
SETTLING BACK FOR CONCLUDING PRAISE

Picture yourself nestled in Jesus' open and loving arms. Sense his tender, gentle care surrounding and enfolding you. Imagine him looking at you with pleasure because he has washed your sins away and adopted you into his eternal family. Let the words of this contemporary hymn fill you with immeasurable hope!

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.
In Christ alone! Who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe,
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.
There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave he rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.
No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life’s first cry to final breath.
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I’ll stand.  

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend  2001

What phrases bring you the most comfort and assurance in this uncertain time?

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19-20
Our Father, who art in heaven,
    hallowed be thy Name.
    Thy Kingdom come,
    thy will be done on earth,
    as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
    and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
    But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
    and the power, and the glory,
    forever and ever. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

PRAYERS FOR THE CURRENT CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Lord Jesus, You are powerful and merciful;
let this be our prayer …

“Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.” (Psalm 57:1)

Lord of Peace, we remember those living in coronavirus hotspots and those currently in isolation. May they know your presence in their isolation, your peace in their anxiety, and your patience in their waiting. Prince of Peace, you are powerful and merciful;

“May your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name.” (Psalm 79:8)

God of all comfort and counsel;
let this be our prayer…

We pray for those who are grieving because of this virus, reeling from the sudden loss of loved-ones. May they know of your presence in their suffering, your comfort in their loss, and your hope in their despair. We name before you those known to us who are vulnerable and scared - the frail, the sick and the elderly. We also remember those doctors, nurses, pastors and family-members caring for all such people right now. God of all comfort, you are powerful and merciful; “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.” (2 Cor. 1:10)
God who heals;  
let this be our prayer...  
We pray for all medical professionals dealing daily with the intense added pressures of this crisis. Grant them resilience in weariness, discernment in diagnosis, and compassion upon compassion as they care for your people. We thank you for the army of researchers cooperating towards an immunization and a cure - give them clarity, serendipity and unexpected breakthroughs, we pray. Rise above this present darkness with healing in your power. You are omnipotent and merciful, “Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” (Jer. 32:17)

God of all wisdom  
let this be our prayer...  
We pray for our leaders - the World Health Organization, the CDC, national governments, and all local leaders, heads of schools, hospitals and other institutions. Since you have positioned these people in public service for this hour, we ask you to grant them wisdom beyond their own wisdom to contain this virus, faith beyond their own faith to fight this fear, and strength beyond their own strength to sustain vital institutions through this time of turmoil. God of all wisdom and counsel, you are all-knowing and merciful; “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.” (Psalm 46:1-2)

May El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty who loves you, protect you now. May Jesus Christ, His Son, who died for you, save you. And may the Holy Spirit who broods over the chaos and fills your life with peace, intercede for you and through you at this time. “My righteous God, answer me when I call to you. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 4:1)

Serenity Prayer for these Uncertain Times  
God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen. (Reinhold Niebuhr)