

## **Lenten Study Guide - 2022**

First Presbyterian Church of  
Moorestown

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“We have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ ... so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayer to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him ... to know God as ... the bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and ask of him — this would be of as little profit as for a person to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him.”

– John Calvin; *Institutes of the Christian Religion*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction to the Study

First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown’s vision, “to be beacons of God’s love and truth, growing together in faith and relationship to Jesus Christ,” is a vision of discipleship. As individuals and as a faith community, we strive to achieve this discipleship vision through worship, connection and service.<sup>2</sup> In the age of COVID-19, living into this vision has been challenging; but we forge ahead in spite of these difficult and uncertain times. Even a global pandemic cannot withstand the sovereignty of our Lord — truly “with God all things are possible.”<sup>3</sup>

I have found tremendous inspiration in our church’s ability to adapt to pandemic challenges and trust we will continue to do so as we enter into year three of a world disrupted by COVID-19. When our choirs could no longer meet in person and declare God’s praise through music, several of our youth began meeting weekly (via Zoom at first) with Joel and Sandy Krott to connect, study the Word of God and pray. They utilized a simple discipleship tool called the Discovery Bible Study (DBS), which has been the driving force behind some of the most transformative worldwide discipleship making movements. This group has grown exponentially over the last two years and is a model for what we *can* and *should* be as a church. The prophet Isaiah wrote that “a child will lead them” — while we usually attribute this to God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ, I am reminded of Jesus’ own remarks in the Gospels, encouraging his followers to have childlike faith.<sup>4</sup> Our kids are our best example of what it means, at this given moment in time, to be a discipleship-minded church.

In the last five months I’ve had numerous conversations with elders, staff, congregants and even a discipleship consultant, Paul Watson, about leveraging the example set by our youth to begin our own intergenerational discipleship making movement. The one common thread in each of these conversations is the importance of prayer and the Holy Spirit’s guidance as the primary catalyst. You will come to learn, in reading our 2022 Lenten book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, that prayer and the Spirit are always the driving force behind our ability to bear fruit, as individuals and as a community of faith. While you spend time reading and discussing *The Way of a Pilgrim* it is my prayer that you will be attentive to the Holy Spirit and be chal-

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 21., Philadelphia: The Westminster Press: 1967, p. 850.

<sup>2</sup> “To Worship God faithfully, Connect Spiritually, Serve Christ locally and globally.”

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 19:26; Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:17; Mark 10:13-16

lenced to cultivate an intentional and transformative prayer life — one that bears fruit and shines the light of Christ to the dark corners of our world.

*The Way of a Pilgrim* originated in mid-nineteenth century Russia and chronicles the spiritual journey of a nameless Eastern Orthodox drifter and his attempt to understand what it means to pray without ceasing. In reading the novel, you will discover that the pilgrim's journey is one of individual and communal transformation — a journey we are invited to participate in. Since *The Way of a Pilgrim* comes out of Russian Eastern Orthodoxy, some of the terminology and ways the pilgrim prays may be new or seem odd (i.e. the invocation and adoration of saints); especially since they are not reformed perspectives on prayer. It is important for us to wrestle with these differences as they help us formulate our own understanding of what prayer is and is not. While the reformed perspectives on prayer firmly reject the invocation of saints (Second Helvetic Confession; 5.025) we can still find value in other examples and ways of praying that are seemingly different to us since they affirm our common belief that prayer “is a response to God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ.” Because of this, we know that prayer takes “a variety of forms, such as: conscious conversation with God; attentive and expectant silence; meditation on Scripture; the use of service books, devotional aids, and visual arts; and singing, dancing, labor or physical exercise”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the reformed tradition has a rich history of dialogue with other Christian faith traditions and does not claim absolute authority in how we practice and live out our faith.<sup>6</sup> In reading *The Way of a Pilgrim* you will encounter numerous saints and foreign orthodox terminology. The novel provides a glossary of terms and brief biographical snapshots on pages 209-217.

In reading this novel, it is my hope, that you, along with many others in our congregation, will develop an unquenchable thirst for prayer. Prayer changes lives. Prayer changes churches. Prayer changes communities. Prayer helps us live into our vision and mission as a church.

“Every serious prayer contains power, not because of the intensity of desire expressed in it, but because of the faith the person has in God's directing activity - a faith which transforms.”

- Paul Tillich; *Systematic Theology*<sup>7</sup>

## Using Your Study Guide

This study guide is comprised of six lessons loosely corresponding to the book's seven chapters. Each lesson consists of two parts: 1) Personal Study and 2) Group Study. The personal study portion includes scripture and resources for prayer; including a time for praying The Jesus Prayer. The hope is that you can identify new ways of praying to strengthen your prayer life. Getting out of your comfort zone is an important part of spiritual growth. You can find other opportunities to strengthen your prayer life by visiting the church website or picking up a copy of our 2022 Lenten Guide. The group section can be utilized with your weekly Lenten study group. If you haven't signed up for a group you can do so by visiting the church website. There are opportunities to meet in person and via Zoom. The group section will provide some insights on prayer, reflections on the book and a time to spend in prayer with one another.

In Christ,

Rev. Wesley R. Allen; Associate Pastor  
First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown

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<sup>5</sup> *Book of Confessions: Study Edition, Revised*. Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox Press, 2017; (W-5.0102).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 439.

<sup>7</sup> Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology*, 267.

## Week One

March 2-8, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read** -- **1 Thessalonians 5:12-22** (NLT)

<sup>12</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. <sup>13</sup> Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other. <sup>14</sup> Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. <sup>16</sup> Always be joyful. <sup>17</sup> Never stop praying. <sup>18</sup> Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not scoff at prophecies,<sup>21</sup> but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. <sup>22</sup> Stay away from every kind of evil.

- **Pray** – The Navigators<sup>8</sup> organization uses the PRAY method to help people learn to pray. They use the word “PRAY” as an acronym based on Jesus’ instruction to pray the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in Matthew and Luke – PAUSE; REJOICE; ASK; YIELD. As we begin our Lenten journey together, you are encouraged to use this as a guide for your personal prayer time. Set aside, 20-30 minutes at the beginning and end of each day to PRAY.

- **PAUSE** – “To start we must stop. To move forward we must pause ... sit quietly. ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ Become fully present in place and time so that your scattered senses can re-center themselves on God’s eternal presence. Stillness and silence prepare your mind and prime your heart to pray from a place of greater peace, faith and adoration.”
- **REJOICE** – “The Lord’s Prayer begins with an invitation to adoration: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.’ Having paused to be still at the start of a prayer time, the most natural and appropriate response to God’s presence is reverence ... Hallowing the Father’s name is the most important and enjoyable dimension of prayer. Linger here, rejoicing in God’s blessings before asking for more.”
- **ASK** – “Prayer means many things to many people, but at its simplest and most immediate, it means asking God for help. It’s a soldier begging for courage, a mother alone in a hospital chapel. The Lord’s Prayer invites us to ask God for everything from ‘daily bread’ to the ‘kingdom come,’ for ourselves (petition) and for others (intercession).”
- **YIELD** – “The final step in the dance of prayer is surrender ... We yield to God’s presence ‘on earth as in heaven’ through contemplative prayer and by listening to His Word, which is ‘our daily bread.’ We yield to God’s holiness through confession and reconciliation, praying, ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.’ And we yield to His power in spiritual warfare, asking our Father to ‘deliver us from evil.’ It’s by surrendering to God that we overcome, by emptying ourselves that we are filled, and by yielding our lives in prayer that our lives themselves become a prayer—the Lord’s Prayer—in the end.”

- **Read** — *The Way of a Pilgrim*; p. 3-18

- **Pray** — set a timer for 30 seconds and pray the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

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<sup>8</sup> [How to Pray Using the PRAY Method | Prayer Resource | The Navigators](#)

## Group Study (60-90 minutes)

### Way of the Week #14: Grow Faith

Take advantage of every chance you have to form your faith—through small groups, classes, and personal study. Be a disciple and look to learn from those who know more of the Bible and Christian life than you do, then look for opportunities to share what you’ve gained with someone else.

### Scripture

#### Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else:<sup>10</sup> “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector.”<sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!’<sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

### Opening Prayer (in unison)

**“Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves; when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little; when we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.**

**Disturb us, Lord, when, with the abundance of things we possess we have lost our thirst for the waters of life. Having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have followed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.**

**Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly; to venture on wider seas, where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.**

**We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future, in strength, courage, hope and love.”**

*(Sir Francis Drake c. 1577)*

### Introduction

Little is known about the origins of *The Way of a Pilgrim*. The earliest known manuscript came out of the ancient Christian monastic community in Mt. Athos, Greece in the late nineteenth century. How the manuscript or story, which originated in Russia, found its way to Mt. Athos is unknown. Some scholars suspect the unidentified pilgrim brought their story to the community or that the story was brought there by another person. The first four chapters tell the story of an unknown pilgrim and his quest to understand the meaning of ceaseless prayer. Chapters five and seven, *The Pilgrim Continues His Way* was added as an addendum to *The Way of a Pilgrim* at the Mt. Athos monastery and adds additional insights and thoughts on prayer. Together, these stories, capture the importance of prayer as a spiritual discipline and exemplify the transformative power of prayer individually and corporately.

In the first chapter we are introduced to a nameless pilgrim, a “homeless wanderer” who only possesses a knapsack with some bread and a Bible. In response to a sermon he hears on 1 Thessalonians 5:17, the pilgrim embarks on a journey to uncover what it means to pray without ceasing. The pilgrim travels from town to town seeking instruction on ceaseless prayer, but everyone he encounters stresses the importance of prayer but cannot provide any help

when it comes to learning how to pray. After a year of traveling, the pilgrim meets an “old man” who begins instructing him on prayer. The old man teaches him that prayer comes from the heart and cannot be fully understood or grasped by the mind; but is the essential catalyst for spiritual transformation. He teaches the pilgrim to pray without ceasing requires humility, “poverty of spirit” and “simplicity of heart.” He instructs the pilgrim to recite the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me” and to reflect on the teachings of the *Philokalia* (a collection of Eastern Orthodox teachings on prayer) as the book is the lens by which one can understand the mysteries of God’s Word. The pilgrim begins reciting the prayer 3,000 times per day, then 6,000 times and then 12,000 times to the point of numbness in his mouth but a profound joy in his spirit. The chapter concludes with the death of the “old man” and the pilgrim continuing his journey practicing ceaseless prayer.

## A Time of Reflection

- I. How do you define prayer and how does the text define prayer? What’s the difference between prayer and ceaseless prayer?

I define prayer as \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

*The Way of a Pilgrim* defines prayer as \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

“Ceaseless interior prayer is a continual yearning of the human spirit toward God.”

page 4

Prayer is a “constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine name of Jesus, with lips, in the spirit, in the heart, while forming a mental picture of His constant presence.”

page 9

“Prayer is found in poverty of spirit and in active experience of simplicity of heart.”

page 6

**\*As a Lenten group break into 3-4 groups of 2-3 people. Have each group use their Bible to read through 4-5 of the scripture passages listed below. After 5-10**

2 Chronicles 30:27

Psalm 4:1

Psalm 17:1

Psalm 20:5

Psalm 86:6

Proverbs 15:8

Isaiah 1:15

Isaiah 56:7

Matthew 11:25

John 17:9

Acts 1:14

Acts 4:31

Acts 6:4

Acts 10:31

Acts 13:3

Ephesians 6:18

Colossians 4:2

1 Peter 3:7

1 Peter 3:13

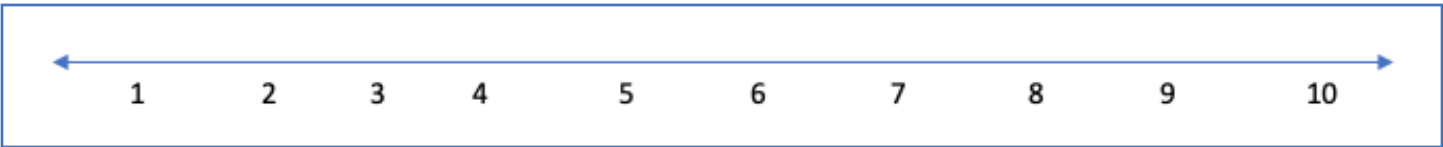
Revelation 5:8

**minutes come back together and have each group explain what they learned about prayer in these verses.\***

Scripture defines prayer as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

- 2. On page 3 the pilgrim ponders how he can succeed in prayer. I've seldom contemplated prayer in this way "what does 'successful' prayer even look like and is 'successful' prayer attainable? What does a successful prayer life look like to you?
- 3. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest, where would you rate your current prayer life? Using the same scale, where do you want your prayer life to be?

**My Current Prayer Life**



**My Future Prayer Life**



**Share your ratings with your Lenten group. What are some attainable goals you can set for strengthening your prayer life? Explore ways you can support one another in reaching these prayer goals.**

**Four ways I will strengthen my prayer life:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

4. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, a confessional document of the PC(USA), not only affirms the scriptural necessity of prayer, but provides guidance on how we ought to approach prayer, “with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and perseverance” (6.114). Where do you see these characteristics of prayer in the *The Way of a Pilgrim*? What role do these characteristics play in your prayer life? How can you incorporate them into your prayer life more faithfully?
5. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, page 5, refers to prayer as a “understanding” which is a word used in our *Westminster Confession of Faith* — what does it mean to pray with understanding?
6. As the pilgrim becomes frustrated that he’s not learning how to pray through sermons he comes up with a backup plan, with “God’s help, to look for some experienced and skilled person” to help teach him and satisfy his desire for understanding ceaseless prayer. Who do you consider to be a spiritual mentor in your life? How can you better utilize this relationship to continue maturing in your faith? If you don’t have a spiritual mentor, who is someone you can ask to be a spiritual mentor? What to you envision this relationship looking like?

### **Make a list of possible spiritual mentors:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

***\*This week, reach out to these people one at a time to discuss them being spiritual mentors \****

7. The pilgrim is introduced to the Philokalia and other teachings on prayer. The pilgrim’s mentor, likens these resources to the lens an astronomer looks through to see the sun. What resources or teachings do you go to that help strengthen your understanding of God’s Word?
8. Spend 5-10 minutes in silent prayer as a group - this will be hard if you’re not used to contemplative prayer but give it a try, “sit down in silence ... lower your head, shut your eyes, breathe out gently, and imagine yourself looking into your own heart. Carry your mind, that is your thoughts, from your head to your heart. As you breathe out say, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me’ ... say it moving your lips gently, or simply say it in your mind. Try putting all other thoughts aside. Be calm, be patient, and repeat the process very frequently.”
9. What did you find most difficult and most rewarding about the prayer exercise?



## Week Two

March 09-15, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read — Luke 9:23-27; 57-62**

<sup>23</sup> And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. <sup>25</sup> For what good does it do a person if he gains the whole world, but loses or forfeits himself? <sup>26</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and *the glory* of the Father and the holy angels. <sup>27</sup> But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.”

<sup>57</sup> As they were going on the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.” <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” <sup>59</sup> And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup> But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.” <sup>61</sup> Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say goodbye to those at my home.” <sup>62</sup> But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

- **Prayer in Action** — Jesus taught his disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. This prayer consists of six petitions:
  1. The name of God be sanctified.
  2. The kingdom to come.
  3. The will of God to be done.
  4. The provision of daily bread.
  5. The forgiveness of sins.
  6. For deliverance from evil.

Use these six points as a template for writing your own prayer. Focus on each point for a period of time, praying for specific things in your life that relate to each of these petitions. Use the space below to write down your prayer.


- **Read** — *The Way of the Pilgrim* pp. 19-45.
  - **Pray** — set a timer for 45 seconds and repeat the Jesus Prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”
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## Group Study (60-90 minutes)

### Way of the Week #15: Welcome Change

Be curious about new ideas, perspectives, and approaches. Get excited by the possibilities that change can bring. What worked in the past won't always work in the future, for God is doing new things.

### Scripture

#### 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

<sup>35</sup> But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” <sup>36</sup> You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; <sup>37</sup> and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. <sup>39</sup> All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one *flesh* of mankind, another flesh of animals, another flesh of birds, and another of fish. <sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the *glory* of the earthly is another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. <sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*. <sup>45</sup> So also it is written: “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” The last Adam *was* a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As is the earthy one, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly one, so also are those who are heavenly. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

### Opening Prayer (in unison):

**I am no longer my own, but thine.**

**Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.**

**Put me to doing, put me to suffering.**

**Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee.**

**Let me be full, let me be empty.**

**Let me have all things, let me have nothing.**

**I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.**

**And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.**

**And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.**

**(John Wesley c. 18<sup>th</sup> Century AD)**

### Introduction

The beginning of chapter 2 in *The Way of the Pilgrim* has the pilgrim fall into several interesting situations. He is first robbed on the road by two military deserters. They steal everything that he has and he is devastated. His spiritual mentor appears to him to offer him encouragement and he ends up finding the soldiers captured by government officials. He meets a Christian man, who tells him a story about his own reading through the Gospels and the pilgrim

reclaims his property. Following this he meets another hermit living in the forest, staying with him for a while. Next, he is spared from a wolf attack because of his rosary. This provokes a conversation between a clerk and an elderly school teacher who inhabit the inn that he is staying at. This conversation is a clash of world-views between the more skeptical clerk and the spiritual old man.

The pilgrim's faith repeatedly saves him from these many difficulties. He learns detachment from his encounter with the bandits, and he experiences providential deliverance through his encounter with the wolf. The conversation he has with the two men reveals an interesting aspect of human interpretation. Both men are confronted with a peculiar situation, yet each of them interpret it differently. The skeptical man sees it as nothing especially exceptional, yet the religious man sees it as spiritually significant.

## Time of Reflection

After his encounter with the wolf, our pilgrim encounters two men. One of them is an elderly school-teacher and the other one is a court clerk. The two have different religious beliefs with the former being more Christian than the latter. The old man tells the clerk that sanctity means "a return through effort and discipline to the state of innocence of the first man." For him it begins with the soul and then the body is made holy through the holiness of the soul." (p. 42)

- Do you agree with the clerk? How would you define sanctity? What is the relationship of future salvation to the original condition of human beings? What sort of innocence does the Christian life attempt to cultivate? What sorts, if any, does it not attempt to cultivate?
- What is the soul? What is the relationship between the soul and the body?

The pilgrim tells the man dwelling in the forest that "the soul could be freed from sinful thoughts only by guarding the mind and cleansing the heart, and that this could be done by interior prayer" (p. 33-34).

- Do you agree that the soul can be freed from sinful thoughts through prayer? Does this happen often or is this rare? How should a Christian handle sinful thoughts? What sorts of thoughts can be classified as sinful and which ones are not?
- What is the relationship between prayer and sanctity? Can prayers make people attain the innocence mentioned in the passage quoted above?

After the pilgrim is robbed, he collapses under a bush and has a dream wherein his *starets* tells him "Let this be a lesson to you in detachment from earthly things, for your better advance toward heaven. This has been allowed to happen to you to save you from falling into the mere enjoyment of spiritual things. God would have the Christian absolutely renounce all his desires and delights and attachments, and to submit himself entirely to His divine will" (p. 22).

- What does Jesus expect from Christians in relation to their "earthly things"? Should we have complete detachment? No detachment? Or should we have some middle position?
- Is there a problem with the enjoyment of spiritual things? If this story was historical would you agree with the *starets*, saying that God allowed this to happen so that the pilgrim would not fall into mere enjoyment of spiritual things? If not for our enjoyment, what else are spiritual things for?
- Does God want us to "absolutely renounce" all of our "delights and desires and attachments?" Is there a conflict between our desires and God's divine will? What does someone look like who has completely submitted themselves to the will of God? Would they have no delights, desires, or attachments? Why does the *starets* advise this?

## Week Three

March 16-22, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read -- 1 Corinthians 12:4-11**

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

- **Pray** - Holy Lord, the giver of all gifts, help me to surrender my life to You and to use the gifts of the Spirit to advance Your Kingdom and proclaim the good news of salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ.
- **Prayer in Action:** Get a packet of Post-It Notes and write 10 prayer requests or scripture verses on ten individual notes. Post the notes throughout your house; affix them to light switches, cabinets, mirrors and doors. When you see one of your notes take a minute and offer up a prayer.
- **Read — The Way of a Pilgrim;** pp. 45 (from the first full paragraph) - 64.
- **Pray** — set a timer for 60 seconds and pray the Jesus Prayer repeatedly: *“Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”*

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### Group Study (60-90 minutes)

#### Way of the Week #16: Give Cheerfully

Rejoice, you get to give! Think of giving as a privilege rather than an obligation, a joy instead of a burden. As you consider all that’s been entrusted to you — time, abilities and money — ask, “How is God calling me to share what I’ve been given?”

#### Scripture

##### 1 John 5:11-15 (NLT)

And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life.

I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life. And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for.

#### Reflecting on Scripture

- What does this passage tell us about God?

- What does this passage tell us about people?
- What does this passage tell us about prayer?

## Opening Prayer (in unison)

**Gracious and merciful God, your Word tells us that we will face trials of many kinds for following you. You have promised that the testing of our faith produces perseverance and steadfastness, which in time, through the power of Your Spirit in us, will bring forth Christ-like character in us. Help me, to embrace trials and help us to see difficulties as opportunities to grow in Your grace and knowledge. Help us Lord to not run from adversity but instead, to use it as a springboard for a deeper and more robust relationship with You. We pray these things, with the full and certain knowledge that you will provide all that we need to face today and every day, no matter how hard or difficult the circumstances may be. Renew a steadfast Spirit within us as we seek to honor You - strengthen us in every way — emotionally, physically and spiritually. Mighty God, for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

## Introduction

In our text this week, the pilgrim becomes a spiritual mentor to a young woman he encounters while praying in the chapel. He learns that the woman is deeply grieved at the thought of entering into an arranged marriage. The pilgrim encourages her to face this trial by praying earnestly instead of running away. The pilgrim, feeling burdened by the demands of those approaching him for advice, decides that he must continue his journey. The pilgrim's spiritual mentor pleads with him to stay in community and not run off in isolation. He does not take the advice of the spiritual mentor and goes on his way. On his journey he encounters the girl whom he taught to pray and learns that she decided to run away. The authorities come and arrest the pilgrim and the young woman. The pilgrim is beaten and banished from the town as a result.

On his journey, the pilgrim stops for rest. In his dreams he speaks to his deceased spiritual mentor. The mentor informs the pilgrim that he will be tested and encourages him to remain vigilant and trusting in the Lord's deliverance. In his dream, the pilgrim is instructed to not isolate himself from the world, but to embrace community and teach people to pray and rely on God without ceasing.

With profound joy and excitement the pilgrim continues his journey. The pilgrim's journey is arduous and taxing on his body. He finds rest at a local church, but soon discovers that he has become paralyzed from the waste down. An attendant at the church offers to heal the pilgrim. He repays the attendant by teaching the man's son how to write. While staying in the town the pilgrim meets a Polish man. The pilgrim spends time with this family and reads to them sections of *The Philokalia*. One evening the Polish man's wife gets a fish bone lodged in her throat, they call for a doctor but it will be at least a day before the doctor can travel to the couple's home. Again, while sleeping, the pilgrim hears the voice of his spiritual teacher who instructs the pilgrim on how to help extract the bone from the woman's throat. The man and woman are relieved and amazed by the healing. Word spreads throughout the village of the miraculous healing. Burdened by the attention and claims of wizardry, the pilgrim takes off in the middle of the night.

The pilgrim next meets a wealthy merchant in the city of Irkutsk who offers to help finance a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The pilgrim shares his story with the merchant and we learn that the pilgrim's parents died when he was two. The pilgrim and his older brother were adopted by their grandfather and raised at the grandfather's inn. We discover that the pilgrim's brother was an envious drunk. When the grandfather dies, he leaves everything to the pilgrim and his wife. In a fit of jealous rage, the brother sets fire to the inn. The pilgrim and his wife lose everything but their Bible (something that brings them much comfort). The wife eventually becomes ill and dies. It is at this point the pilgrim begins his journey.

## A Time of Reflection

1. The Pilgrim keeps wanting to self-isolate; however, he keeps having dreams and encounters with people encouraging him to be communal. Why do you think the pilgrim is so resistant to this idea?
2. Read Jonah chapter 1, what similarities and differences do you see between the pilgrim's story and Jonah?
3. When in your life have you felt God calling you to do something? What was it and how did you respond to God's call? If you haven't responded, how can you respond?
4. Tell your story.

***Take 15-20 minutes to think about YOUR faith story. Use the space below to make notes. When everyone is finished share your story with your Lenten Group.***

### My Faith Story

- What was your life like before becoming a Christian?
- How did you become a follower of Christ? Who were some of the primary influences in becoming a Christian?
- How has Jesus changed your life? How has God used you to enact change in your house, community and church?

5. The pilgrim, while drawn to the comforts of solitude, is often pushed by God outside of his comfort zone. He frequently encounters new people with whom he is given the opportunity to share his prayer journey and faith story. Where might God be challenging you to step outside of your comfort zone to share your faith? Identify two to three people you can share your faith story with.

This week I will share my faith story with ...

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Spend 10 minutes as a group in prayer then close your session by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

## Week Four

March 23 - March 29, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read - Matthew 6:5-8**

<sup>5</sup> “And when you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they will be seen by people. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But as for you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

<sup>7</sup> “And when you are praying, do not use thoughtless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- **Prayer in Action — A different prayer posture:** Most of us Presbyterians pray with our eyes closed and our hands together. Most people in the Bible used to pray with their eyes open and their hands lifted towards heaven. Recite the Lord’s Prayer three times, adopting this posture. If you like, continue with this posture for the Jesus Prayer activity.
- Read *The Way of the Pilgrim* pp. 65-104.
- Pray the Jesus Prayer for 60 seconds.

### Group Study

#### **Way of the Week #17: Show Who You Really Are**

Our church is for “real” people. Bring your true self, including your joys, your sorrows, your fears, your strengths and your weaknesses. God loves you as you are. Don’t hide your struggles, failures or problems.

#### **Scripture**

##### **1 Corinthians 15:42-49**

<sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable *body*, it is raised an imperishable *body*; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*. <sup>45</sup> So also it is written: “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” The last Adam *was* a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As is the earthy one, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly one, so also are those who are heavenly. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

#### **Opening Prayer (in unison)**

**Lord, deprive me not of Your heavenly and eternal blessings.**

**Lord, deliver me from everlasting torments.**

**Lord, if I have sinned in word or deed, in mind or spirit, forgive me.**

**Lord, deliver me from all distress, ignorance, forgetfulness, laziness and stony hardness of heart.**

**Lord, deliver me from all temptations and spiritual abandonment.**

**Lord, enlighten my heart which has been darkened by evil desire.**

**Lord, being human, I sin; but You, being God, have mercy on me.**



**Lord, take heed of the weakness of my soul, and help me with Your grace that Your holy name may be glorified in me.**

**Lord Jesus Christ, inscribe the name of Your servant in the book of life, granting me a blessed end.**

**Lord my God, I have done nothing good; yet by Your compassion help me to make a new beginning.**

**Lord, refresh my heart with the dew of Your grace.**

**Lord, God of heaven and earth, remember me, who am sinful, wretched, evil and impure, in Your kingdom, according to Your steadfast love.**

**Lord, receive me in repentance and do not forsake me.**

**Lord, put me not to the test.**

**Lord, grant me good thoughts.**

**Lord, grant me tears of repentance, remembrance of death and contrition.**

**Lord, grant me sincere confession of my thought.**

**Lord, grant me humility, deliverance from my own will and obedience.**

**Lord, grant me patience, forbearance and meekness.**

**Lord, implant in me Your holy fear, the source of all blessings.**

**Lord, enable me to love You with all my soul, my mind and my heart; and my neighbor as myself.**

*(St. John Chrysostom c. 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD)*

## **Introduction**

Chapter four opens with the pilgrim's plans to go to Jerusalem disrupted, so he heads elsewhere. He is taken in for a while by a devout family who are eager to share his company. He and the family share several stories with one another. The pilgrim meets a pious blind man and the two decide to travel together. After leaving the blind man in the company of others, he journeys once more on his own. He has a few more interesting encounters, and then after several years the pilgrim recounts time he spent at a convent, where he exchanged stories with a few religious residents.

This chapter shows the pilgrim having many conversations with strangers. There are times when he desires to get away and say his prayers in isolation, but is prevented by Christians eager to get to know him. Through his willingness to listen to them, he learns many encouraging stories from the lives of these people who have been touched by the grace of God.

## **Time of Reflection**

The narrative recounts a story about a priest who performs his church's liturgy exceptionally slowly. When asked about it, he says, "I like to meditate on each prayer and rejoice in it before I say it aloud. Without that interior appreciation and feeling every word uttered is useless both to myself and to others. Everything centers in the interior life, and in attentive prayer! Yet how few concern themselves with the interior life..." (p. 98)

- What is an interior life? What is an exterior life? Do you agree with the Priest that the interior life is the most important for a Christian? How does one cultivate the interior life? Conversely, how would one cultivate an external life?
- Do you think that you do a good job of cultivating your interior life? Do you want to do a better job? What do you think would be the internal/external dynamic in the future Kingdom of God?

At one point the pilgrim describes a time in his life where he longer to pray. He said "I felt as it were hungry for prayer, an urgent need to pour out my soul in prayer, and I had not been in quiet nor alone for forty-eight hours. I felt as though there were in my heart a sort of flood struggling to burst out and flow through all my limbs. To hold it back caused me severe, even if comforting, pain in the heart, a pain that needed to be calmed and satisfied in the silence of prayer." (p. 86)

- Have you ever felt this way before? Would you like to feel this way about prayer? What practical steps could a person take to get to this point? Do you think that the pilgrim had this same hunger for prayer when he first began his monastic journey?

- Is the desire to withdraw from people necessarily connected to the desire to pray? Do you think one can have a hunger to pray that leads to one gathering with people rather than withdrawing from them?
- The pilgrim describes his desire to pray as both comforting and painful. How can these both be true? What do you think of the desire to pray causing him pain? What do you think about the desire to pray causing him comfort?

The pilgrim remarks that “...we live far from ourselves and have but little wish to get any nearer to ourselves. Indeed we are running away all the time to avoid coming face to face with our real selves, and we barter the truth for trifles. We think, ‘I would very gladly take an interest in spiritual things, and in prayer, but I have no time, the fuss and cares of life give no chance for such a thing.’ Yet which is really important and necessary, salvation and the eternal life of the soul, or the fleeting life of the body on which we spend so much labor?” (p. 79).

- Do you agree with the pilgrim that we are “far from ourselves”? If so, why do we run from our true selves?
- What can we do to find out true selves? How does prayer help us find our true selves?
- What is the right relationship between the care we provide for our bodily existence and our spiritual life? In other words, how much time should we devote to spiritual practice and how much time to our regular bodily life? Are these two always in conflict?

## Week Five

March 30- April 05, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read -- Matthew 6:5-9**

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

- **Pray - Matthew 6:10-13** - *When praying pause for 5 seconds between each line.*

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

*Pause*

May your Kingdom come soon.

*Pause*

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

*Pause*

Give us today the food we need,

*Pause*

and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

*Pause*

And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

*Pause*

Amen.

- **Prayer in Action:** Start a prayer calendar — you can do this using a calendar application on your phone like Google Calendar, iCalendar or Outlook — block out two 10-15 minute time periods each day (or something that takes you slightly out of your comfort zone) on your calendar and pray. You can use the prayer below, write your own, or use one of these prayers: <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/prayer/10-morning-prayers-to-use-daily.html>. Start by being still and freeing your mind from outside distractions — repeat the Jesus Prayer until you have stilled your mind at the feet of Jesus.

“Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Lord, you are holy and worthy of all praise. You created the universe and all that is within it. Creator God, forgive me for abusing the world you’ve entrusted me with. As waters and temperatures rise, use me to bring healing to your creation. Forgive me Lord for not loving you as I ought. Humble me, that I may become more like Christ in the ways I think and act. Forgive me for not loving my neighbor as myself. Help me to put aside prejudices and differences — help me to see people through your eyes, as people, like me,

created in your very image and likeness. Help me to see the brokenness in our world and use me to bring healing. Where there is hatred and division make me a peacemaker. Where there is injustice use me as a witness to your reconciliation. Lord, I thank you for the grace you have given me — a grace I don't deserve. Help me to show grace in the same way — in my home, in my work, and in my relationships. Gracious God, thank you for provided for my every need. Create in me a clean heart and renew my spirit — transform me and help me see the person you intend for me to be. Amen."

- **Read** — *The Way of a Pilgrim*; pp. 105 - 154.
  - **Pray** — set a timer for 75 seconds and pray the Jesus Prayer repeatedly: "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."
- 

## Group Study (60-90 minutes)

### Way of the Week # 18: Ask for Help

Part of being a real and authentic member of the church is to acknowledge your weaknesses and to be willing to ask for God's help and support of others. None of us can go it alone. Vulnerability is a sign of strength and a gift to other.

### Scripture

#### Matthew 26:36-44 (NLT)

Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!"

Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done." When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open.

So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again.

### Reflecting on Scripture

1. What does this passage tell us about God?
2. What does this passage tell us about human beings?
3. What does it tell us about prayer?

### Opening Prayer (in unison)

**Jesus, Lamb of God,  
when you walked this earth  
you did not consider  
heavenly equality,  
though that was yours to choose,  
but took the role of servant,**

**and in humility  
and obedience  
allowed the rough nails of our sin  
to be hammered into your flesh  
for the sake of our salvation.  
And so it is  
that we acknowledge you  
as Lord of all,  
to the glory of God the Father,  
Son and Spirit, Three in One.<sup>9</sup>**

## **Introduction**

The pilgrim is unable to continue his trip to Jerusalem due to the death of the trips benefactor. The death and inability to visit Jerusalem troubles the pilgrim; however, he submits himself to God's will. He decides to visit the city of Kiev instead. On his way the pilgrim witnesses the death of a young man, who, as if he were possessed, submerges himself in the cold Siberian spring melt and dies from hypothermia. The pilgrim, having just experienced the death of his benefactor, continues to wrestle with the concept of fate as it relates to God's providence. He comes to the conclusion that there is simply much in life "we can have no clear understanding" (p. 111).

The pilgrim continues his journey and eventually meets up with another 'traveler,' a Jewish-Christian man, Evreinov, which translates as "son of a Jew." Evreinov shares the story of his father's conversion to Christianity. The two men decide to room together where they are introduced to another traveler — a non-commissioned officer. The next day the three are getting ready to leave but are interrupted by the tolling of a bell announcing the beginning of a prayer service. The pilgrim and Everinov decide to go to the prayer service while the non-commissioned officer decides to get a head start on his travels. While on the road the commissioned officer realizes he misplaced his passport and needs to head back to the town to find it. He encounters the pilgrim and Everinov who suggest this too was part of God's plan since the man chose to skip the prayer service. The three travelers eventually go their separate ways and the pilgrim comes across a young man praying in the woods. The young man's story mirrors the pilgrims.

The pilgrim eventually reaches Kiev where he visits an Eastern Orthodox Church and learns how to rightly confess his sins. He confesses and partakes in communion. The priest encourages the pilgrim to visit a sacred shrine at a monastery in Pochaev and the pilgrim sets off for the monastery. In his travels the pilgrim meets a man who grew up in the same region as the pilgrim. The man was from a different sect within Eastern Orthodoxy and didn't think too highly of the pilgrim's sect.

The pilgrim soon encounters an older Greek monk from the Athos Monastery in Greece. The two men end up spending five days together where they are immersed in praying the Jesus Prayer and discussing different ways of saying it. Another pilgrim visits the two men and shares with the monk and pilgrim his hatred of Jewish people. The monk rebukes this man and instructs him to pray so that he may be "grounded in the love of God" (p. 139). The monk recovers from his illness and the pilgrim continues his journey to Pochaev.

On the road he meets a soldier who is "near death" (140). The soldier shares his story, one of sin, drunkenness, and depravity, with the pilgrim. The two converse about God's mercy and love for all, even those who would consider themselves to be the most heinous sinners. The two travel to Pochaev, constantly in prayer, and the soldier confesses his sins, takes communion and continues in prayer. The soldier agrees to spend his remaining days in prayer. The pilgrim decides to go back to Kiev, where he appreciated all he had learned from the priest there. In his travels he meets a learned man, a professor. The professor seldom separates himself from a copy of the Gospels he carries with him. The professor teaches the pilgrim that the Gospels contain great instruction on prayer and that prayer and the Gospels go hand in hand - they are tied to each other.

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<sup>9</sup> John Birch <https://www.faithandworship.com/#gsc.tab=0>

## A Time of Reflection

1. Identify a time in your life where God closed a door? What was your initial reaction? Looking back, where do you see God at work even though you didn't get what you wanted?
2. Discuss the relationship between free will and God's providence.

### • Free Will

- "A free [person] is one who chooses, decides and determines himself [or herself] and acts according to his [or her] thoughts, words and deeds."<sup>10</sup>
- "Freedom is a central element of the Christian message ... It is necessary to consider a freedom *from* and a freedom *for*. The former points to sin, to greed, to oppression, to injustice, to need; conditions that all require liberation. The latter points to the reason for this freedom: love, that is communion, is the final stage of liberation. *Freedom for* gives a profound meaning to *freedom from*."<sup>11</sup>

### • Providence

- "Christians confess the lordship and providential care of God over the world. God the creator does not abandon the creation, leaving it to run on its own, as deism teaches. The true God is no absentee landlord but remains ever faithful, upholding, blessing, and guiding the creation to its appointed goal."<sup>12</sup>
  - "The almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty — all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand."<sup>13</sup>
3. What is the purpose of confession? In the Eastern Orthodox tradition confession is one of seven sacraments. Presbyterians on the other hand believe there are two sacraments, communion and baptism, instituted by Jesus Christ; nevertheless, confession or confessing our sin is an integral characteristic of reformed theology. Why do we confess our sins regularly?
  4. The pilgrim writes down a list of ways he has sinned throughout his life (pp. 125-126). The pious priest he speaks with in these pages tells the pilgrim that his record of sins is unnecessary because he has already received forgiveness for these sins during prior practices of confession. The priest instructs him to confess how he has not loved the Lord God alone, hates his neighbor, doesn't believe in God's word and is filled with pride. The pilgrim disagrees with the priest's assessment. The priest admonishes the pilgrim and teaches him that confession is a form of "inward humility." What is the connection between confession and humility?
  5. John Calvin writes, "Paul himself leaves no room for doubt, when he says, that corruption does not dwell in one part only, but that no part is free from its deadly taint. For, speaking of corrupt nature, he not only condemns the inordinate nature of the appetites, but, in particular, declares that the understanding is subjected to blindness, and the heart to depravity (Eph. iv. 17, 18)."<sup>14</sup> For Calvin, sin is inescapable, it infects the mind and body of all people. Calvin's view on the sinful nature of humankind became known as

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1968), 84.

<sup>11</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation Theology and the Future of the Poor," in *Liberating the Future: God's Mammon and Theology*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 115.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014, 3rd edition), 274.

<sup>13</sup> "The Heidelberg Catechism," A. 27, in *The Book of Confessions* (PSUSA), 4.027."

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (New York, Seedbox Press, 2013), 403.

total depravity, meaning, as human beings we are entirely corrupt. Consequently, humans are unable to redeem themselves and can do no good work apart from God's grace. How does Calvin's view of sin inform your understanding of confession and our need to confess regularly?

6. The pilgrim meets an educated gentleman on one of his journeys. The man invites the pilgrim into his home for a cup of tea and conversation. They decide to travel to a monastery together and on their way the pilgrim observes that the man is constantly reading his Bible. The pilgrim asks the man, why is it that "you never allow the Gospels out of your hand day or night?" The man responds, "Because, from it and it alone I am almost continually learning ... the Christian life, which is summed up in prayer" (pp. 148-149). What role does the Word of God play in your life? How often do you immerse yourself in Scripture?
7. Do you agree with the statement, "the Christian life ... is summed up in prayer"? Why or why not?
8. Joshua 1:8 (NLT) — "Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do." What changes will you make in your life to study the Word of God more faithfully?

## Week Six

April 06 - April 13, 2022

### Personal Study

- **Read — Matthew 6:5-9**

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

“When you pray, don’t babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

- **Pray** — God of the ages, our deliverer and provider, we bow in humility before your grace. You feed us with the divine — your Word — your body. You quench our thirst with living water. You guide our feet through snares and snakes. You free us from slavery to sin and self and shame and death. You lead us on the long way to holiness and home. Grow in us wholehearted allegiance, that our blessing and devotion may never waver, that we may always recognize and trust your desire to do us good. Amen.<sup>15</sup>
- **Prayer in Action** — On your prayer calendar write down the names of two people for each day this week (family, co-workers, friends) and contact them on the corresponding day via text, email or a phone call. Ask, “How can I pray for you today?” Commit to praying for them, either with them, if over the phone, or simply offer up a prayer to God lifting up their request(s).
- **Read — *The Way of a Pilgrim*; pp. 155 - 207.**
- **Pray** — set a timer for 90 seconds and pray the Jesus Prayer repeatedly: “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

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### Group Study (60-90 minutes)

#### **Way of the Week # 19 — Accept and Don’t Cast Stones**

God’s love opens the doors of our church to all people. Just as Jesus did, welcome people as they are. It’s not up to us to judge. Love unconditionally, as Christ has received you, receive others.

#### **Scripture — Romans 15:7-9a**

Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them.

#### **Reflecting on Scripture**

1. What does this passage tell us about God?
2. What does this passage tell us about human beings?

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<sup>15</sup> Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia. *Wilderness Prayer*. [www.revlisad.com](http://www.revlisad.com), 2017.



3. What does it tell us about prayer?

## Opening Prayer (in unison)

**We keep to-do lists so we don't forget. We check them twice. We carry them in our pockets. Holding them in our pockets. Holding on to the pain — the disappointment — the failure. Reviewing the wrong; point by point by point. Plotting revenge on ourselves and others. We carry them. They keep us cross — wounded and bleeding — divided and dying. You take our lists — crossing out, crossing off, nailing them to your tree — burying them in a blaze of love so we may rise free. You keep no record of wrong. Instead, you write our names on your palm. A life list on your lifeline — a love list by your scar. Hallelujah.**<sup>16</sup>

## Introduction

Chapter six is a conversation between the pilgrim, the educated man (professor), a spiritual mentor (Starets) and a monk (Skhimnik). The chapter focuses on salvation and more specifically the importance of prayer as a means to salvation (not the means of). The means of salvation comes from God through Jesus Christ. Prayer is identified as the starting point for faith and good works. Prayer produces spiritual fruits - faith and works. Simply put, prayer life-changing and transformative; prayer brings “happiness and enlightenment” and changes people “from weak and negligent people into *podvizhniki* (someone who has attained a high level of practice in spiritual discipline) and champions of virtue” (181). Prayer is a powerful force. Like all good things, prayer can be misused and abused (think the pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18, which is frequently cited throughout the book) and challenges us to approach prayer cautiously and with an abundance of humility.

In the final chapter, seven, we are introduced to a hermit (who breaks his vow of silence) and Moldavian monk. The chapter sums up several points made throughout the book; including, the negative aspects of material deprivation to attain spiritual enlightenment, the necessity of a spiritual mentor, and the importance and value of interior prayer.

## A Time of Reflection

1. The monk instructs the group that salvation is predestined by God (p. 159). What do you think is meant by predestination?
  - Predestination is one of the most misunderstood doctrines of reformed theology. Predestination does not mean that some people are chosen by God for salvation while others are rejected, it is simply a way of affirming that God is the source of salvation, that all people have an innate knowledge of God and that human beings cannot redeem themselves. Through free-will we respond to God's act of mercy by accepting or rejecting it.
2. They discuss faith as a spiritual gift given by the Spirit (p. 164), something Paul references in his first letter of the church in Corinth, 12:4-11. We often overlook faith as spiritual gift, how do you see faith as spiritual gift?
  - “The act of faith is not rightly understood when it is viewed as mere assent to propositions presented to us by the church or the Bible. Christian faith is the act of personal trust in God made known in Christ, not bare assent to propositions about God or Christ. The Reformers distinguished between two ways of believing. One way is to believe certain things about God — for example, that God exists, or that Christ performed miracles. Luther called this historical or factual knowledge rather than faith in the proper sense. The other way is to believe in God. When I put my faith in God, “I not only believe that what is said about God is true, but I put my trust in him, surrender myself to him.”<sup>17</sup>
3. What is the connection between faith and predestination?
4. On p. 165 they discuss good works as a requirement for salvation, a belief that gave rise to the Protestant Reformation. What do you see as the relationship between faith, good works and salvation.

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia. *No Record of Wrongs*. [www.revlisad.com](http://www.revlisad.com), 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014, 3rd edition), 527.

- “The differences in the interpretations of the doctrine of justification by the sixteenth-century Reformers and the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church as expressed in the Council of Trent were real. At the same time, the dispute was complicated by sharp polemics and mutual misunderstandings. Roman Catholic theologians believed that the Reformers’ doctrine of justification taught only a purely legal change of status in the believer’s relation to God and thereby disregarded the importance of a transformed Christian life and the call to obedience and service. The Reformers charged that the Roman Catholic teaching made good works a prerequisite for ‘attaining the justifying grace of God. They taught that new life and good works are the fruits rather than the precondition of God’s act of justification by grace alone to be received by faith alone.’ In 1999, after years of study and discussion, official representatives of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches signed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This declaration does not resolve all issues. Nevertheless, it is significant that these churches were able to make this common confession: ‘By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.’”<sup>18</sup>

5. The goal of prayer is “union with God” (170). The first time I experienced this was while attending a prayer retreat through the Francis House of Prayer. We spent Saturdays for three months in contemplative prayer and read Teresa of Avila’s work, *The Interior Castle*. Avila viewed contemplative or interior prayer as entering a compound where God is at the center and through our prayer life we move through 6 different mansions to get to the 7th where there is a mystical union with God. I have always found this a beautiful and profound image and have yet to venture, through prayer, to the most interior parts of the ‘castle.’ *The Way of a Pilgrim* asserts that this mystical union with God is achieved by spending intentional time in prayer. What makes spending time in prayer so challenging?
6. The motivation behind prayer matters (181). How should we approach prayer?
7. The *Skhinnik* shares “On the Power of Prayer” (pp. 182-184) - reflect on these thoughts and discuss as a group. Do you agree or disagree, why or why not?
  - Prayer enlightens the mind and drives away ill-judged thoughts.
  - Prayer bears fruit - spiritual and material.
  - Prayer conquers and destroys passions.
  - Prayer overcomes fear.
  - Prayer is a work in progress.
  - The more we pray the less time we have for acting in sinful ways.
8. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of the monastic life?
9. How has your prayer life improved throughout Lent? In what other ways (other than prayer) has *The Way of a Pilgrim* challenged or strengthened your spiritual life?

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 528-529.