



40 Days
of
Prayer
to begin 2020

Accompanies the message series, **Holy Sexuality: The United Methodist Dilemma**

Welcome! This is your personal invitation to join with the rest of our church family for 40 Days of Prayer. We will be praying for our church, our community, our call to be Jesus' hands and feet, and for our broader United Methodist Church.

Our call to prayer coincides with the six-part message series, *Holy Sexuality: The United Methodist Dilemma*. As you may well know already, our denomination has been embroiled in a 40+ year debate over biblical interpretation and application regarding human sexuality – specifically regarding same-sex sexual practice. In recent years, this conflict has escalated and is threatening to split the United Methodist Church. Out of a conviction to do what they feel is right, many churches and pastors are currently living in open defiance to our church's teaching that God intended marriage to be a lifetime monogamous commitment between one man and one woman and that same-sex sexual activity is contrary to God's design and intention.

Our church leadership feels it is time for our entire congregation to be informed of the situation, invited to prayer, and to take time to wrestle with God's Word around the relevant topics. So, together we want to enter 2020 seeking God's wisdom and guidance ahead of an important gathering of the UMC's highest decision-making body, the General Conference, on May 5-15 of this year.

This prayer journal will guide you through the topics of the sermon series as well as unite our hearts in prayer for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to a faithful reading of God's Word. These are difficult topics that may have very real implications for you and/or people you love – people who God loves! So, as you pray and study and reflect, please do so with these guidelines in mind:

1. Pray for your heart to be transformed by humility
2. Ground yourself in God's Word
3. Respect differing opinions
4. Stay focused on our mission of inviting people on a journey with Jesus
5. As questions arise in your heart, **write them down and save them** for the end of the 40 days when we will have talk-back sessions you're invited to attend. Date TBA
6. If at any time you have pastoral concerns and feel the need to talk through them with a pastor, please contact the church office to set up an appointment.

Helpful Information:

Oswald Chambers once said that **“Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.”** For the next 40 Days you have an opportunity to engage in the greater work. The prayer journal you are holding has been designed to engage you daily in conversation with God. You will have the opportunity to meet with God through a variety of prayerful moments.

Each day you will engage in studying scripture that correlates with the sermon series that we are working through. The Scripture is all written in the “Today's New International Version.” This version was chosen because it is the version utilized in our pew Bibles and on our overheads during worship. You are encouraged to engage in other versions of the Bible if you believe that will help you connect with God.

Along with the Scripture that is provided, you will find that there are moments of reflection, structured and contemplative prayer, and silent meditation. There is an area for notetaking at the back of the journal if you have questions or thoughts that you want to write down. This space for notes would be a great place to write down questions or thoughts you might want to bring up at the talk back sessions following the end of the six-week sermon series. You will also see links for a variety of “soak songs” throughout the journal as well. These songs are very much a moment of prayer. I encourage you to find a quiet place to let the music wash over you and utilize the lyrics as a prayer to God.

Know that while you are praying to God throughout this journal, our pastors and staff are praying for you. If at any time during these moments with God you feel like you need to talk, we again want to encourage you to reach out to our pastoral staff. We are here for you as you engage in the greater work.

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1

Psalm 111:1-10

¹ *Praise the Lord.*

*I will extol the Lord with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.*

² *Great are the works of the Lord;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.*

³ *Glorious and majestic are his deeds,
and his righteousness endures forever.*

⁴ *He has caused his wonders to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and compassionate.*

⁵ *He provides food for those who fear him;
he remembers his covenant forever.*

⁶ *He has shown his people the power of his works,
giving them the lands of other nations.*

⁷ *The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.*

⁸ *They are established for ever and ever,
enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.*

⁹ *He provided redemption for his people;
he ordained his covenant forever –
holy and awesome is his name.*

¹⁰ *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
All who follow his precepts have good understanding.
To him belongs eternal praise.*

Prayer:

Father God, as we start this New Year,
we stand in awe of you.

We take time to praise you; knowing that you are a God worthy of adoration.

Guide us Lord, as we humbly seek your wisdom.

We give these 40 days to you saying,
have your way, Lord Jesus, Have your way. Amen.

DAY 2: THURSDAY, JANUARY 2

Matthew 16:24-25

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves **and take up their cross and follow me**. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."*

Reflection: What must it have felt like in that moment. Imagine it. You are a disciple, Jesus comes up to you, looks you in the eye, and simply says, "take up your cross and follow me."

You have a decision to make; and the possibility of your life changing forever.

Questions to Ponder:

What might it look like to follow Jesus in your daily life?

Is God asking you to take up your cross and follow him?

Go Deeper: Reach out to your small group leader or a member of the church staff and inquire about their "call" story. Note how their story is both different and similar to your own experience with Jesus.

DAY 3: FRIDAY, JANUARY 3

Matthew 16:24-25

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciples **must deny themselves** and take up their cross and follow me. For **whoever wants to save their life will lose it**, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."*

Reflection: You can't go to that restaurant, they serve alcohol. You can't go to that movie it's rated R. You can't go to that neighborhood, it's not safe. You can't go to that church, you won't fit in.

Growing up I remember hearing these statements from Christian friends, family members and individuals in my church. They were the statements that made me think, "Okay, if I just throw away all of my non-Christian CD's, that will get me closer to Jesus." "If I just hang out with Christian friends, that will make me more like Jesus." "If I drive the speed limit that will make God happy."

Where do these voices come from? If we look to the Bible verses today, we see that Jesus isn't making these kinds of statements. Yes, he is asking us to deny ourselves; but what does that really look like?

Maybe Jesus is saying you should go in that restaurant; if there's someone in there that He is calling you to be in community with. You should go to that neighborhood and love on the lost. You can go to that church and make a difference because I am with you. Life isn't about what we do and don't do; it's about what voice we are listening to.

Questions to Ponder:

Is Jesus the loudest voice we hear, or is someone in our past or present telling us what it should look like to be holy?

What can we do to hear Jesus' voice better?

Go Deeper: Read 1 Kings 19:11-12

DAY 4: SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

Matthew 16:24-25

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but **whoever loses their life for me will find it.**"*

Reflection: What an interesting concept. If you try to save your life, you'll actually lose it. If you lose your life for Christ, you will find it. It's our natural instinct to step away from danger and to protect ourselves. It's Jesus' instinct to protect others, to the point of giving his own life. Let that soak in.

So it seems like the question is: Are you daily working toward losing your life or are you daily working toward saving your life?

Soak Song: "Jesus Paid It All"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ymkl0t0FOcw>

DAY 5: SUNDAY, JANUARY 5

Psalms 133:1-3

¹ *How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*

² *It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.*

³ *It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*

Prayer Focus: Spend time today in prayer asking God to unite us as a church, unified in Christ alone. The prayer labyrinth picture is provided below as a tool to quiet yourself and focus as you pray. Start at the "entrance" at the bottom and slowly pray for unity as you move through the labyrinth. This movement symbolizes a movement towards Jesus, and once you reach the center take time to just sit in the presence of our Lord. When you are ready to start your day, leave the labyrinth knowing that you are not alone. God goes with you into the world.



DAY 6: MONDAY, JANUARY 6

Mark 7:20-23

He went on: "What comes out of you is what defiles you. For from within, out of your hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, evil, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile you."

Reflection: Take time praying over each word that is listed in the scripture above. Ask God to reveal any area of sin in your life that might defile you. Pursue the Holy Spirit in this time.

Prayer: Father God, we start this new week humbling ourselves in your presence. We pursue you and we ask that the Holy Spirit awaken in us a knowledge of any area of our lives that we have either knowingly or unknowing held close to our hearts and away from you. Lord, we do not want to take this time to see the speck in our neighbors' eye, we trust that you, and you alone, will work in their lives. Help us Lord to see the plank in our own eye. Our sin is great. Help us to recognize our need for you. Amen.

Go Deeper: Read Matthew 7:1-5

DAY 7: TUESDAY, JANUARY 7

Mark 1:14-15

*"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe the good news!**"*

Reflection: The repentance called for throughout the Bible is a summons to a personal, absolute and ultimate unconditional surrender to God as Sovereign. Though it includes sorrow and regret, it is more than that. In repenting, one makes a complete change of direction (180° turn) away from self and toward God.

Prayer: Lord God, I want to boldly turn away from my own desires, my own path in life and instead turn towards You. Lord, help my desire be You alone. Lord help my path be following in your footsteps. I choose repentance, because I now know, repentance leads to a transformation only found in You. Lord, I ask that You take my hand and help me as I take the first step to turn towards You. Amen.

DAY 8: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8

Galatians 5:2-23

*Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again, I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.***

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will have to pay the penalty, whoever that may be. Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. **But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another humbly in love.** For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law.*

Prayer Focus: Think of a "neighbor" in your life that you can pray for, and spend time praying for them today.

Go Deeper: Find a way to make the biblical story come to life. Pray that God would show you a tangible way to love your neighbor as yourself. Make a meal for a single adult you know. Call a family member that you haven't talked to in some time. Reach out to a friend and take them out for coffee. Find creative ways to show others love this week!

DAY 9: THURSDAY, JANUARY 9

Genesis 1:27

So, God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Reflection:

"Oh wow, you look just like your mother."

"You have your grandfather's eyes."

"You have freckles just like your sister."

So often in life we see ourselves through the lens of the people around us. We are defined by who we look like, what we do for a living, what high school we went to, and what size clothing we wear.

The truth is that God tells us that is not how He sees us. When God looks at us, He sees His image. No matter how much sin has distorted His image in us, He still sees his beautiful creation. And that beautiful creation that he sees he tells us that he sees it as very good.

Question to Ponder:

What does it mean to be created in God's image?

Go Deeper: Take time today to read the creation stories (Genesis 1-2)

DAY 10: FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

Genesis 2:7

*Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils **the breath of life**, and the man became a living being.*

Silent Meditation: Spend time in silence with God. If this is your first time being still with God, try starting out by setting an alarm on your phone for 90 seconds.

Reflection: Notice how much longer 90 seconds feels when you are trying to be still and hear the Lord's still small voice. Notice how your mind struggles to be still. Moments of silent meditation are vital for our relationship with God because just like when we were created, God continues to breathe life into our lives. Silent meditation is a way for us to quiet ourselves so that we can focus on our breathing as we open ourselves up to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 11: SATURDAY, JANUARY 11

1 Corinthians 6:12-17

"I have the right to do anything," you say – but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything" – but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Prayer:

Father God,
You have given us the right to make our own choices,
But you have given us the knowledge to know that not every choice is beneficial.
Provide us with your wisdom and help be one with your spirit.
Amen.

DAY 12: SUNDAY, JANUARY 12

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins people commit are outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

Soak Song: "Lead Me to the Cross" Hillsong United
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StW6ZKHRCFo>

DAY 13: MONDAY, JANUARY 13

John 1:12

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Reflection: God gives us the invitation and the choice to **receive** and **believe**. Spend time today reflecting on these two words. When you are ready, take a moment to pray as the Spirit leads you regarding your relationship with God.

DAY 14: TUESDAY, JANUARY 14

Matthew 19:3-9

Some **Pharisees** came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So, they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Reflection: Take time today to read yourself into the biblical story. What does it feel like to be the Pharisees? How does it feel to be Jesus and continuously be questioned?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always answering our questions, even when we do not come to you with the best intentions. Help us to understand your answers and to see the beauty of creation through your eyes. Amen.

DAY 15: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15

Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:24

So, God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Reflection: Imago Dei. The image of God. We ALL are created as image bearers. God created us uniquely to each represent him to the world around us.

Prayer Focus: Pray that God helps you to see ALL of creation as image bearers.

DAY 16: THURSDAY, JANUARY 16

Matthew 19:10-12

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Reflection: As a single individual think back and remember a time when a family member or friend asked, "the question." When are you going to settle down? As a married person do you remember those times before you were in a relationship. How did it make you feel to be questioned about why you were *still* single? When the disciples ask this question, Jesus answers counter culturally. **"The one who can accept this should accept it."**

There are times when we ask Jesus a question and He answers; but not how we expect Him to. He doesn't follow the cultural norm. He answers and he expects more from us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to see the world through your eyes and not through the cultural worldview of the day. Help us Lord to continue to ask the hard questions and seek your wisdom. Amen.

DAY 17: FRIDAY, JANUARY 17

Matthew 22:23-33

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

*When the crowds heard this, they were **astonished** at his teachings.*

Reflection: When is the last time that you were astonished by God?

DAY 18: SATURDAY, JANUARY 18

Ephesians 5:31-32

*"For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." **This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.***

Go Deeper: Go online and look up the multiple biblical references to the bride of Christ.

Prayer Focus: The unity of Christ and the church.

DAY 19: SUNDAY, JANUARY 19

Hosea 2:19-20

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord."

Reflection: Take time today to watch the 6 videos on the book of Hosea that we watched as a church during our sermon series in December. Reflect on how the story of Hosea makes you feel. What does it tell you about who the Lord is?

Go Deeper: Take time to read through the entire book of Hosea (don't stress – it's only 9 pages!) See how the bible uses the story of Hosea and Gomer to illustrate the relationship of Christ and the Church. How does the book of Hosea connect with the Scripture reading from yesterday: Ephesians 5:31-32?

DAY 20: MONDAY, JANUARY 20

Genesis 19:1-11

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surrounded the house. They called out to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them."

Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him and said, "No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

"Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

Silent Meditation: Spend time reading the above Scripture one section at a time (there are six). After each section take time to be silent and give God the opportunity to speak to you in the stillness.

Soak Song: It Is Well, With My Soul (UM Hymnal #377)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY5o9mP22V0>

DAY 21: TUESDAY, JANUARY 21

Jude 1:1-25

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these people speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals – these are the very things that destroy them.

"Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Soak Song: "King of Kings" Hillsong Worship
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Of5IcFWiEpg>

DAY 22: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22

Ezekiel 16:47-50

You not only followed their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore, I did away with them as you have seen."

Reflection: There are times when you will read Scripture and it will evoke emotion. Take time today to wrestle with the statement "Therefore I did away with them as you have seen." Sit with this statement. How does it make you feel? Take those feelings to God in prayer today.

DAY 23: THURSDAY, JANUARY 23

Leviticus 18:1-30

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees and laws, for whoever obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.

"No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord.

"Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother, do not have relations with her.

"Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father.

"Do not have sexual relationship with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.

"Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, that would dishonor you.

"Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister.

"Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister, she is your father's close relative.

"Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister, because she is your mother's close relative.

"Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt.

"Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her.

"Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother.

"Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.

“Do not take your wife’s sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

“Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.

“Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor’s wife and defile yourself with her.

“Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molek, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

“Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.

“Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; this is a perversion.

“Do not defile yourself in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so, I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the foreigners residing among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all of these things were done by people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

“Everyone who does any of these detestable things – such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.”

Prayer: Father God, we come to you today, humbly kneeling at the foot of the cross. We give you our pasts, we give you our present, we give you our future. Forgive us for the decisions that we have made that were not a part of your will. Help us to hear you. Help us to follow you. We long to be in your presence and in your will. Thank you, Lord, for your forgiveness and unending grace. Amen.

DAY 24: FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

Leviticus 19:2, 18

"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'"

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."

Reflection: The word **Holy** is defined as: 1: exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness. 2: divine for the Lord our **God** is **holy** — Psalm 99:9 (King James Version) 3: devoted entirely to the deity or the work of the deity a **holy** temple **holy** prophet. 4. To be set apart or unique

Prayer Focus: Personal Holiness

Soak Song: Take Time to be Holy (UM Hymnal #395)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmj6DAeeL3k>

DAY 25: SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

Leviticus 20:13

"If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."

Reflection: There's no doubt about it, this is a difficult passage that can stir up a lot of emotion. Please remember to write down questions that might come to your mind as you prepare to hear the upcoming sermon on Sunday. Remember, there is a place for additional notes in the back of this journal.

Prayer Focus: Spend time today focused on being holy. The prayer labyrinth picture is provided below as a tool to quiet yourself and focus as you pray. Start at the "entrance" at the bottom and slowly pray for personal holiness as you move through the labyrinth. This movement symbolizes a movement towards Jesus, and once you reach the center take time to just sit in the presence of our Lord. When you are ready to start your day, leave the labyrinth knowing that you are not alone. God goes with you into the world.



DAY 26: SUNDAY, JANUARY 26

Psalm 136:1-9

¹ *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
His love endures forever.*

² *Give thanks to the God of gods.
His love endures forever.*

³ *Give thanks to the Lord of lords:
His love endures forever.*

⁴ *To him who alone does great wonders,
His love endures forever.*

⁵ *Who by his understanding made the heavens,
His love endures forever.*

⁶ *Who spread out the earth upon the waters,
His love endures forever.*

⁷ *Who made the great lights –
His love endures forever.*

⁸ *The sun to govern the day,
His love endures forever.*

⁹ *The moon and stars to govern the night;
His love endures forever.*

Soak Song: "Forever" Chris Tomlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eZoibrmDik>

DAY 27: MONDAY, JANUARY 27

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

*Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor the idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.***

Reflection: There is a turning point in this Scripture reading and it's a simple three letter word. The word is BUT. You read prior to the word and you feel the weight of your sins upon you. You feel the hopelessness of a fallen world and broken relationship. But then one word is spoken. BUT. From that point on grace rains down. You are washed white as snow. You are sanctified. You were justified. You are loved.

Prayer: Lord we do not deserve your grace, but we cannot thank you enough for it. Thank you for making us clean. Thank you for second chances. Thank you for one hundred and second chances. Thank you for loving us. You are good, good Father, and you are worthy of our praise! Amen.

Soak Song: "Holy Water" We The Kingdom
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0xhhG1Hyos>

DAY 28: TUESDAY, JANUARY 28

1 Timothy 1:8-11

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for the lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers. And it is for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus,
As we spend time examining our lives, our hearts and our minds, we grow weary at times. Please remind us today that you are here with us. You delight in us as we pursue you. Amen.

Soak Song: "Remind Me You're Here" Jason Gray
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Adg3GPGInBE>

DAY 29: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

Romans 1:18-32

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all of the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a life and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Silent Meditation: Spend time in silence with God. Try setting an alarm on your phone for 3 minutes.

Reflection: Notice how much longer you can remain in silence after prayer is a part of your daily routine. Three minutes might have been easier than the first time of silence when you did 90 seconds. If being silent is still very difficult, that's ok! Don't give up! Remember that moments of silent meditation are vital for our relationship with God because just like when we were created, God continues to breathe life into our lives. Silent meditation is a way for us to quiet ourselves so that we can focus on our breathing as we open ourselves up to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Go Deeper: Reach out to a friend, family member or church leader and share with them your experience, thus far, in prayer, and specifically in silence.

DAY 30: THURSDAY, JANUARY 30

Romans 2:1-4

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So, when you, a mere human, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we come to you today and we repent. We do not say these words without understanding the weight that they hold. We know the sin we have committed; we understand that we have judged others while all along sinning ourselves. Lord, we cry out, Father forgive us, we want to be different. Help us be different. Amen.

Soak Song: "I Want to be Different" Micah Tyler <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUT4trsrBCw>

DAY 31: FRIDAY, JANUARY 31

Romans 3:22-24

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to ALL who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and ALL are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Reflection: Is there something standing between you and Jesus? Do you feel unworthy of his grace? I encourage you to reach out to a member of the pastoral staff to discuss these feelings. We are here to pray for you and with you.

Prayer Focus: God's Grace

DAY 32: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1

Revelation 2:18-29

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: There are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So, I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burdens on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’

To those who are victorious and do my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – they ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’ – just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give them the morning star. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Prayer:

Lord God,

We ask that you open our ears. Let us hear what the Spirit has to say. We are your church. We are the bride of Christ. Guide us Lord. Move us forward. Amen.

DAY 33: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2

Psalm 1:1-3

¹ *Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,*

² *but who **delight** in the law of the Lord and meditate on his law day and night.*

³ *They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.*

Reflection: What might it look like to delight in the law of the Lord? Pray to God for guidance on how to delight in Him fully.

Go Deeper: Read Matthew 13:1-23

DAY 34: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3

Romans 12:1-2

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Prayer Focus: Utilize the Scripture text today as your prayer to God. Read each line and pause as you reflect on the significance of these powerful words.

DAY 35: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Prayer:

Father God. You know our hearts. We have failed to be a people who did not pass judgment. We have failed to love you with our whole hearts. Help us Lord. Let this day, and every day following, be a movement towards you. Lift up our head so that we are always focused on you. We bow down and humble ourselves knowing that we are not worthy, BUT that you give your grace freely nevertheless. Thank you, Lord, Thank you! Amen.

DAY 36: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Philippians 2:3-4

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.

Reflection: With a humble heart, think of others that you could pray for.

Go Deeper: Go out and show someone the love of Christ today. Buy the food of the person in the car behind you at the drive through. Purchase diapers for a young mother. Take a meal to a sick friend. Be creative!

DAY 37: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationship with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had:

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 human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Reflection: Read through the Scripture a second time slowly. What words stand out to you? What might God be teaching you through this Scripture and those words?

Prayer Focus: Christ-like Humility

DAY 38: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7

Philippians 2:9-11

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 every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflection: Find a quiet place today and spend time with God in a posture of prayer. Bow down on your knees. Lay prostrate on the floor. Humble yourself in God's presence and let him speak to you.

Soak Song: "Nothing Else" The Belonging Co
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLBvCTV23qw>

DAY 39: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

John 8:2-11

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again, he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Have no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Reflection: What a powerful moment! Take time today to read yourself into the story. What would it have felt like to be the woman? What would it have felt like to be a Pharisee?

Prayer: Father God, Thank you for loving us when we are the Pharisee. Thank you for forgiving us when we are the woman. We thank you for your grace that knows no bounds. We love you, Lord. Amen

DAY 40: SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Revelation 21:1-8

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Soak Song: "Fullness" Elevation Worship

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eecUQR0czU>

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, as we come to the end of this prayer journal, we thank you for meeting us where we were and walking us to where we are now. We give you all the praise for the healing, restoration, and transformation that has happened and will continue to happen in our lives. You Lord, are worthy of our praise, and we are thankful for your unending love. Please let this be the beginning of a new thing. Let my life be centered on you, in prayer and worship.

And all God's people said, **AMEN.**

Reading List for “Holy Sexuality: The United Methodist Dilemma”

On Reading the Bible

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

More Cultural and Historical Engagement

A Better Story: God, Sex & Human Flourishing by Glynn Harrison

Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality
by Nancy R. Pearcey

From a Progressive Perspective

Stranger at the Gate by Mel White

God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships by Matthew Vines

What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality by Daniel A. Helminiak

Our Strangely Warmed Hearts: Coming Out into God's Call by Karen P. Oliveto

A Balanced View

Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views by Dan O. Via and Robert A.J. Gagnon

From a Traditional Perspective

Is God Anti-Gay? And other questions about homosexuality, the Bible and same-sex attraction by Sam Allberry

What does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality by Kevin DeYoung

Out of a Far Country: A gay son's journey to God. A broken mother's search for hope. By Christopher Yuan and Angela Yuan

Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story by Christopher Yuan