



SERVING IN HOPE

Daily Devotions for Volunteers

**Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.**

Psalm 25:4-5

You have journeyed to be here – whether you traveled many miles or just few, you left the familiarity of your home to accompany a community in their process of recovery. You have also begun a spiritual journey of discovery and transformation. Through this week, you will learn about a new place and the neighbors of this community. You will learn about your fellow volunteers. Perhaps you will learn new skills or discover new things about yourself. It is our prayer that along this journey you will be open to the leading of the Spirit that you might see the ways God is moving in, through, and around you to transform suffering into hope.

This devotional offers a selection of **prayer practices** to help ground you through the week, **scripture verses** to use as centering prayers or touchstones, and daily scriptural musings to prompt **reflection** and help debrief your experiences through the week. Use each as much or as little as suits you. You may want to use some pieces for individual devotion and other pieces for group study or evening worship.

Labyrinths are an ancient spiritual practice inspired by pilgrimage journeys. Unlike a maze, there is only one path in a labyrinth. In this finger labyrinth, you can trace the black line from the large heart at the base, to the small heart in the center, and then trace the path back out. Use this practice as a way of focusing your mind and spirit in prayer.

Blessings on your journey.



Prayer Practices

Blessing

“May you go out today in peace
believing in God’s power to transform all creation, including you.”

Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God’s Creation, Sam Hamilton-Poore (2009: Upper Room)

Daily Review

Begin by taking a moment to settle your body and mind. In your mind or in a journal, catalog the day’s activities and experiences. Take note of the sights, smells, tastes, textures, and feelings of the day. Ask yourself:

- o When did I encounter sorrow or challenge today?
- o When did I encounter joy or hope today?
- o How, today, did I follow in the way of Christ?
- o Where did I fall short of Christ’s example?
- o Where did I glimpse God’s presence?

GRACE

Gratitude - What is something from today for which you are grateful?

Repentance - Did you cause hurt today by something you did or did not do?

Take a moment to pray for forgiveness and to consider how you can repair the relationship.

Affirmation - Rest for a moment in the assurance that you are Beloved by God.

Contemplation - What challenged your thinking today? Take a moment to reflect on that idea or moment and how it might invite you into deeper relationship with God and neighbor.

Emulation - When today did you see someone - on your team or in the community - embodying the love of Christ? How might you follow their example?

Breath & Body

Breathe deeply and recall that we receive life by the very breath of God.

With each inhale, pray “Spirit of God, fill me.”

With each exhale, pray “Spirit of God, guide me.”

As you pray and breathe, stretch your body – use yoga poses or gentle stretches of your arms, neck, legs, and back.

Rest in the loving presence of God.

Prayer

Loving God,
enliven my senses to recognize what is beautiful;
open my mind to know what is true; and
arouse my heart to love what is good,
by the grace and example of Christ. Amen.



On the Eve of Service

Daily Reflection **The Greatest Commandment**

Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” 32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Why do we volunteer? Simple – it is one way we express our love for God and for our neighbors. By living out our faith in this way, in active love, perhaps we get a glimpse of the kingdom of God come near.

Through this week, offer your full self to active love – your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let love shape your attitude each day even when the work is frustrating, or your team is getting on your nerves. Let love expand your willingness to be flexible, patient, and generous. When your energy flags, show love to yourself by resting, eating, and hydrating, and let love revive your strength in service to others.

Love with all your understanding as you learn about this place, the experience and struggles of this community, and the ways we can work together for justice.

Blessing for the Week

Bless these hands - for skillful work and humble service.

Bless these mouths - for words that are clear and encouraging.

Bless these minds - for new ideas and hopeful dreams.

Bless each day - that we might glimpse your presence.

Bless each night - that we might rest in your tender embrace.

Bless this week, Creating God, as we join in your work of love and life.



Work Day 1

Centering John 13:34-35

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Prayer: Loving God, guide me in my thoughts, words, and actions today, that I might love as Jesus loved. Amen.

Daily Reflection Philippians 2

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... (If you have time, read the full chapter.)

A former disaster recovery site director used to say to groups of volunteers at orientation, “We don’t need you to be a savior. We’ve already got one of those, and he did a pretty good job.” His point is uncomfortable, but necessary, for all of us to hear. It is not our job to save anyone; our job is to accompany disaster survivors on their journey of recovery.

Volunteers can be an incredible source of hope for a community, as our presence reminds them that they are not forgotten or alone. Our gifts of time and talent, as well as the material investments we make in the community are a critical part of a recovery. Yet, when volunteers enter a community with the attitude that we are here to fix, save, or “do for” survivors, we can do more harm than good. Rather, we should approach our work with the mind of Christ described in Philippians 2.

Having same mind that was in Christ Jesus is not about stepping into the role of a savior but rather into the role of a servant, with an attitude of humility and mutual love.

As you go through this week, consider how you can practice humility and look to the interests of others in your interactions with locals and with your fellow volunteers.



Work Day 2

Centering Micah 6:8

The Lord has told you, O mortal, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God?

Prayer: God, by your mercy inspire my love of mercy. Teach me to recognize where injustice persists and where I can act for justice. Order my steps in paths of humility and love. Amen.

Daily Reflection Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (if you have time, read the full parable)
36 “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Jesus tells this parable in response to the question “Who is my neighbor?” In a generous reading of the story, this is a genuine inquiry about faithful living; by a more cynical reading, the lawyer questioning Jesus is trying to find an “out” to limit his responsibility to others. The story Jesus tells disrupts the typical boundaries of who we should care for. The Samaritan – an outsider – helps the man on the road, binding his wounds, taking him to safe shelter, and ensuring his future needs are taken care of.

CHARITY AND JUSTICE, A PARABLE popularized by community organizer Saul Alinsky, 1930s

Once, some people gathered by a river for a picnic. As they ate, someone noticed a baby in the river, struggling and crying. The baby was going to drown! Someone rushed to save them. Then, they noticed another screaming baby in the river, and they pulled them out. Soon, more babies were seen drowning in the river, and the townspeople were pulling them out as fast as they could. It took great effort, and they began to organize their activities to save the babies as they came down the river. As everyone else was busy in the rescue efforts to save the babies, two of the townspeople started to run away along the shore. "Where are you going?" shouted one of the rescuers. "We need you here to help us save these babies!" They replied, "We are going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!"

What does this story say to you about the relationship between charity and justice? Does it change the way you read the story of the Good Samaritan? What do you think the relationship is between mercy, charity, justice, and being a neighbor? What does it mean to be a good neighbor – in your own town and on this trip?



Work Day 3

Centering Ephesians 3:14-19

16 I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. 18 I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Prayer: In the face of suffering and weariness, God, strengthen my spirit, and root me in your love, that I might be filled to overflowing. Amen.

Daily Reflection Isaiah 58:8-12

(If you have time, read the full passage.)

6 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

...

12 Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

The prophet in this passage accuses the people of thinking they are doing right by God by being “churchy” while neglecting (and worse, oppressing) the people around them. Professor Amy Oden writes, “The people, individually and corporately, cannot have a full relationship with God without a just relationship with each other.” How do you think our relationships with one another affect our relationship with God?

The people the prophet is addressing are in the midst of rebuilding their ruined city, their community, after generations in exile. This week, you are also working with a community that is in a process of rebuilding. While disasters are devastating, they can also present an opportunity for communities to build back in more sustainable, equitable ways. What would a city and community look like if they were based on the things the prophet names in verses 6, 7, 9, and 10?

As you think about this week, how are you putting into practice the values in this passage? What would it look like to put those values into practice in your own community?



Work Day 4

Centering Colossians 3:12-14

12 Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Prayer: Holy One, cover me today with your compassion. Grant me kindness and patience in my actions. Move me to seek and offer forgiveness where it is needed, and tune my heart to the harmony of your grace. Amen.

Daily Reflection Matthew 24:31-46

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats (if you have time, read the full parable)
37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

With each new tragedy on the news, we might ask, "Where are you, God?" But we already know the answer – God is here, in the midst of those who are hurting. When Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-40), he reveals to us a mystery: God is most tangibly present in this world where people hunger, thirst, lack adequate clothing and shelter, and are sick or imprisoned. Christ claims as family members people who suffer and says Christ is so present in them that when you feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger – you feed, and care for, and welcome Christ.

As you have worked this week, where have you encountered Christ? Perhaps in the others on your team or in the survivors you have met?

People who have been helped by Week of Compassion frequently comment that "you were here" after the flood, the earthquake, the fire. The shared offering allows the church to show up and be here when people are in need. Because Week of Compassion works with congregations and organizations that are on the ground, with deep roots in affected communities, we can be present quickly. Yet, while most donations come in within a week of a disaster, the needs extend long after disasters, which is why Week of Compassion stays for the long-term. Now, years after the news cycle has moved on, you are here, helping people rebuild their lives, meeting needs and encountering the presence of Christ.



Work Day 5 (or Returning from Service)

Centering Hebrews 10:24-25

24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,
25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Prayer: Gracious God, too often, in our pettiness, selfishness, and lack of concern we provoke each other to anger and disregard. Transform my mind and heart so that I might be encouraged in faith and provoke others to love and good deeds. Amen.

Daily Reflection Genesis 41:14-38

Pharaoh's Dream

(If you have time, read the full story)

34 Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. 35 Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. 36 That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

In times of feast, we can prepare for the times of famine. In this story, we read that the years of abundance provide more than enough for the seven years of famine. The stored grain is not only enough for the Egyptians but also enough for them to be generous to others.

A most remarkable part of the story of Pharaoh's dream is how many people struggled to interpret the message. Perhaps it was easier to feign ignorance than face the difficult reality. But Pharaoh and Joseph take the dream seriously and face the difficult truth of it, even when it will necessitate some unpopular policies and collective sacrifices. If we had the dream Pharaoh had, would we take it seriously? Would we insulate ourselves from the effects of the lean years, allowing our neighbors to suffer? Or would we act to prepare ourselves and our communities for the calamity ahead?

Truth is, we have received more than a dream. In fact, many of the consequences of climate change have already begun taking effect – notably in more frequent and more severe weather disasters. The question, then, before us, is whether we will allow the lean-year cows to gobble up our neighbors, our siblings, our futures. This week, you have been responding to the needs of our neighbors affected by such disasters. How will you take this experience back home? How can your congregation work to address both the impact and causes of climate change?

