



GROW. PRAY. STUDY

Maple Grove United Methodist Church – Weekly Devotional Guide

January 27, 2019 – *Unafraid – Living with Courage and Hope*
“Friendless and Alone?”

Scriptures:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it... Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

Genesis 2:15, 18

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me...

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?...

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

Psalms 139:5, 8-10

I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. *John 13:34*

MONDAY 1.28.19 – Intentional times of being alone with God

Read: [Matthew 14:23](#), [Mark 1:35](#), [John 6:15](#)

Jesus loved people, yet he regularly sought solitude as a way to refocus and cultivate his walk with God. For some of us, a fear of being alone can grow so strong that we nearly panic if we find ourselves alone. We may almost fixatedly seek to be with others, perhaps even in settings or situations that do not match our stated values. It’s a useful spiritual practice to learn to value solitude, intentional or unintentional, and grow stronger through it.

- “The experience of solitude varies widely from taking advantage of the little solitudes in our days to setting aside planned times of retreat to step out of our daily patterns in order to enter into the silence of God.... Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place.” * Where, both in daily routines and in more deliberate ways, are you able to experience solitude? Do you fear those times, live through them passively, or value the opportunity for spiritual growth they give you?
- The gospel passages often associated prayer with Jesus’ times of solitude. Of course, he also prayed when around people (e.g. John 11:41-42). But we see that he often found solitude conducive to prayer. In what ways do you find prayer different when you are alone than when you are with others? What strengths can you see in each kind of prayer setting?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me not to shun times of solitude, or to waste them in wishing I were not alone. Teach me how to use those moments, whether minutes or days, into times to draw closer to you. Amen.

* Quoted from <https://renovare.org/about/ideas/spiritual-disciplines>, a service of the Renovare Institute, founded by Richard Foster, the author of the classic book *Celebration of Discipline*.

TUESDAY 1.29.19 – When trying to “do it alone” is destructive

Read: [Exodus 18:14-18](#)

Task: lead a throng of ex-slaves safely through the Sinai desert. They hadn't learned to work out even minor conflicts—their slave masters had run everything. Few of them had developed even basic leadership skills, or had reason to give leadership any thought. Moses found himself trying in person to iron out every little problem the people had. But his father-in-law wisely told him, “What you are doing isn't good.... You can't do it alone.”

- It was good that Moses took his role as leader seriously. “The people come to me to inquire of God,” he said. But his father-in-law was God's instrument to remind him that he wasn't called to be a solo act, handling everything himself. What tasks do you carry alone right now? Look prayerfully at what parts of them you could share with others.

- We often carry an emotional burden about challenges in our workplace, family or church, even though there is nothing specific we could do to fix the situation. Or we may be able to affect one part of the problem, but convince ourselves that we alone must figure out the full solution. Have you ever tried to carry “the weight of the world” on your shoulders alone? How can you recognize people God may have sent to lighten your load?

Pray: God, I can't do your job. Deliver me from the temptation to try to be what you, and only you, can be—the ruler of the universe. Remind me not to try to “do it all alone.” Amen.

WEDNESDAY 1.30.19 – Our deep need for connectedness

Read: [Genesis 2:18](#), [Ecclesiastes 4:7-12](#), [John 14:18-19](#)

News reports, and mission partners in various parts of Africa, have showed us the plight of more than 100 million orphans and vulnerable children due to the AIDS epidemic. Genesis 2 stated a human truth: it isn't good for us to be all alone. And Jesus, in a land where poor health and Roman violence left many children orphaned, used that image to promise his followers that, whatever befell their human connections, he would never leave them as orphans. Through the Holy Spirit, he would always be with them.

- Sometimes seen as bitter and cynical, the wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes warmly valued human friendship. “Two are better than one,” he wrote. They “can help each other, can keep each other warm and safe.” * Then he added that “a three-ply cord doesn't easily snap,” which “may imply that three companions are even better than two.” * In what ways have you found value in doing things with another person or two, rather than all alone?

- In John 14, Jesus gave his followers a glimpse into the mysteries of God. He preceded the verses we read today by promising to send “another Companion” (Greek *paraclete*, which meant companion, helper, advocate and comforter, and referred to the Holy Spirit). Then he said, “I will come to you”—in other words, the Spirit's presence was his presence. When have you sensed Jesus' comfort, protection or uplift without a visible presence giving it to you?

Pray: Lord Jesus, thank you for keeping your promise not to leave me as an orphan. Teach me how to claim you as my Companion and Comforter, even when my circumstances seem the hardest. Amen.

* Brent A. Strawn, study notes on Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1061 OT.

THURSDAY 1.31.19 – God calls us to provide community for those who are alone

Read: [James 1:26-27](#)

True devotion to God, James said, doesn't show itself in grand words, whether they are lofty or angry. Our devotion shows most truly as we actively care for and help those who have to face the world alone. That can be as simple as extending friendship and human warmth to those whose circumstances leave them alone, or as demanding as becoming foster or adoptive parents (*for information on Fostering or Adopting in Iowa, go to www.iowafosterandadoption.org*) ordinary Christians suffered from social and legal persecution. But life in those conditions was even harder for orphans and widows, who had no family and no legal standing at all to protect them. Which, James asked, would help them more—a biting, angry tirade against the tyrants, or a tangible act of love and assistance? How can we apply the principle behind his words to situations we face today?

- “Orphans and widows in the Old Testament symbolize the most unfortunate members of society (see Exod. 22:22-24).” * If James were writing today, who might he list in his letter as among the most unfortunate members of society? As you think about those people, is your heart moved with compassion, or do you find it uncomfortable and try to put them out of your mind?

Pray: Lord God, I'm devoted to you—after all, I read the GPS. Give me the insight and the courage to find tangible ways to live out that devotion, serving you by serving others who are alone and hurting. Amen.

* Patrick J. Hartin, study notes on James 1:27 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 456 NT.

FRIDAY 2.01.19 – God knows and loves you, inside and out

Read: [Psalm 139:1-12](#)

Have you ever had moments when you feared God had given up on you? Or maybe had a time when you tried to run away from God? The psalmist said that, no matter where we go, God goes there with us. But this sweeping poem didn't merely assert God's presence—it also told believers that God's presence is a good thing, because God will always guide, strengthen and support us.

- Suppose all of the promises in this psalm were shaped into a “commercial” for God. Would you believe them? Would you want to have a God who watched over you so faithfully and patiently? Which parts of your life, of yourself, do you keep the most hidden? God knows all about them—and looks on you with compassion and love anyway. Talk trustingly to God about those hidden things today—and listen inwardly for God's response.
- Jesus began the Lord's Prayer (which we say each week in worship) with “Our Father who is in heaven.” “Heaven” translates the Greek word *ouranōs*, which meant, not a place far away, but “air” or “sky.” Jesus was not saying God is far away, but around us, above us, wherever we go—the same idea as verses 7-12 in today's reading. What helps you experience God's presence? What spiritual difference does that make for you?

Pray: Dear Jesus, at my worst, I feel like hiding from you. At my best, I want you to stay with me all the time—and that's exactly what you've promised to do. Amen.

SATURDAY 2.02.19 – You're never alone when God is with you

[Psalm 27:7-10, 68:3-6, John 16:32](#)

Every time we baptize a child, the pastor tells the parents that God's design is that they model God's love and goodness for their child. In this broken world, in Bible times and still today, human parents, friends and spouses sometimes fall sadly short of living out God's design. But Scripture said that, even if our human relationships let us down, we do need to fear being alone and friendless. We can always depend, if we will, on God's loving presence with us.

- Part of our faith heritage, starting with Methodism's founder John Wesley, is a profound sense of calling and mission. We believe God calls us to be God's voice, hands and feet, in a hurting world. God's work, the psalms said, is to provide a family for orphans, a sustaining relationship for widows, and companionship for all who might be lonely. How can you join in God's work (and, in the process, build better relationships for yourself)? Do you know anyone who may not be an "orphan" or "widow" in the concrete sense of the term, but who you could uplift by extending God's love and care?

Pray: O God, the psalmist said you are "Father of orphans and defender of widows." Thank you for always being with me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting, and use me to bless them with your love and caring. Amen.

Family Activity: At times, everyone fears feeling alone or unloved. As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to bring comfort and care to others. Discuss each person's unique gifts and abilities. How can those be used to comfort others? How can those same gifts be combined with those of other family members to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how they can be used to comfort people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family's "heart" as a reminder to comfort others this year.