

DAILY SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Repeat this practice every day this week. The preparing, responding, and integrating elements remain the same every day. This repetition enables you to dwell in the practice more deeply through the week and it often opens you to new insights and experiences of God. The listening part of your practice changes so that each day can focus on a different aspect of the reflection on Scripture. Feel free to use the questions provided to guide you or to follow your own process as you meditate with the reading and the thoughts presented here. **PREPARING** Spend a few moments in silence. Get comfortable and ground yourself in your body. Slow and deepen your breathing and focus on your breath entering and leaving your body. If any thoughts come up, notice them and then let them go. If you need to make a note of anything so that you can return to it later, then do that. When you're ready, light your first Advent candle, the Candle of Hope, and spend a few moments meditating on the flame. Next, shift your awareness to the theme of today's meditation. The following questions may help you in your reflections:

- How do you sense and experience God's Presence in this moment?
- What is helping you and what is hindering you from feeling connected with God's Presence?
- What past experiences or present concerns make you want to go to sleep, literally or metaphorically?
- What can you do today to be more alert to and aware of the Presence of God in your world and life?

When you feel ready, you may want to offer this, or some other prayer: No matter what today holds, no matter what I may have to face, endure or enjoy today, I live in God's Presence and I pray to be more alert to the signs of God's Presence that I will encounter. Amen. **LISTENING** Insert the **LISTENING EXERCISES** for the relevant day at this point in your spiritual practice. **RESPONDING** When you feel ready, spend a few moments responding to your reflections of today. Consider whether you feel alert, awake and aware in this moment, or if you feel, or want to feel, asleep at all. Now take a few moments to notice what stood out for you in today's practice. Journal any thoughts that are especially helpful or challenging and consider how you will work with these thoughts through the day. Finally, give yourself some time to sit quietly and enjoy the Divine Presence within you and around you. **INTEGRATING** As you end your spiritual practice think of one thing you can do today to be more alert to the signs of God's Presence and how you will nurture a more consistent awareness of God's Presence through the day. One helpful practice can be to set regular alarms on your phone or watch during the day to remind you to stop what you're doing, close your eyes, and notice God's Presence for a few moments. At the end of the day, you may want to journal the impact that nurturing the sense of God's Presence has had on your life. Close this time of personal spiritual practice with a short moment of silence or a prayer of thanksgiving and preparation for the rest of your day.

Monday

Return to the reflection at the start of this week, or to your notes from Sunday's sermon. Take note of anything new that may have stood out for you today. If you want to, you can spend your whole

time working through what spoke to you. Or you can use the following questions to guide your prayer and meditation: How do you respond to stress, anxiety, insecurity or overwhelm? In what ways are you tempted to sleep, literally or metaphorically, in response to these experiences? Now turn to

Psalm 23.

Read through the passage once and then spend a minute or two in silence as you reflect on how it connects with this week's theme. Then read the passage through a second time, noticing anything new that may stand out in your reading. When you read these words from the Psalm: The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. What thoughts arise in your mind? How do you respond emotionally?

What happens in your body?

Take time to meditate on these words and your response to them. And then consider how the Psalmist's praise for the rest that God brings relates to Jesus' call to be alert and awake in troubled times. How does getting enough rest and sleep empower you to be more alert and awake when you need to be? End this listening part of your practice today by journaling any thoughts or experiences that you want to treasure, keep in mind, or return to later.

Tuesday

Return to the reflection at the start of this week, or to your notes from Sunday's sermon. Take note of anything new that may have stood out for you today. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke to you. Or you can use the following question to guide your prayer and meditation: Advent invites us to recognise that we can choose how we will see and experience our world. And in order to make this choice, it instructs us to pay attention—to our world, to others, to ourselves, and to God and God's Presence. What can you do to pay attention more intentionally today?

Now turn to

Matthew 6:26-33.

Read through the passage once and then spend a minute or two in silence as you reflect on how it connects with this week's theme. Then read the passage through a second time, noticing anything new that may stand out in your reading. When Jesus tells his disciples to "Look at the birds" and "Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow" he is encouraging them to draw wisdom from paying attention to the natural world. Jesus often encourages his followers to "have ears to hear" or to "look and see" certain things. For Jesus awareness is an important facet of our spiritual life. As you consider this, what thoughts arise in your mind?

How do you respond emotionally?

What happens in your body?

Take time to meditate on these words and your response to them. And then consider how Jesus' words teach you to be more alert, aware and awake. What can you do today to put this teaching

into practice in your life? End this listening part of your practice today by journaling any thoughts or experiences that you want to treasure, keep in mind, or return to later.

Wednesday

Return to the reflection at the start of this week, or to your notes from Sunday's sermon. Take note of anything new that may have stood out for you today. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke to you. Or you can use the following questions to guide your prayer and meditation: How willing are you to really see the reality of what's happening in your world and then look deeper to see the larger, spiritual realities at play? How can you do this more intentionally in your daily living?

Now turn to

Revelation 21:1-4.

Read through the passage once and then spend a minute or two in silence as you reflect on how it connects with this week's theme. Then read the passage through a second time, noticing anything new that may stand out in your reading.

When you consider that the writer of Revelation was imprisoned in isolation on the Isle of Patmos when he wrote his vision, what thoughts arise in your mind?

How do you respond emotionally?

What happens in your body?

Take time to meditate on this passage and your response to it. And then consider how the writer was able to look beyond his own prison and the turmoil in his world to see God's Presence and saving activity underneath everything else that was happening. Consider how you can learn to see God's Presence and activity in your world even when things seem chaotic and uncertain. End this listening part of your practice today by journaling any thoughts or experiences that you want to treasure, keep in mind, or return to later.

Thursday

Return to the reflection at the start of this week, or to your notes from Sunday's sermon. Take note of anything new that may have stood out for you today. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke to you. Or you can use the following question to guide your prayer and meditation: The Scriptures, and many others sources of spiritual wisdom, teach that one of the most important practices in spiritual health and maturity is knowing oneself.

What can you do today to deepen your knowledge of yourself?

Now turn to

Psalm 139:1-18.

Read through the passage once and then spend a minute or two in silence as you reflect on how it connects with this week's theme. Then read the passage through a second time, noticing anything new that may stand out in your reading.

When you consider the Psalmist's experience of knowing that God's Presence is always there and also knowing that God knows them completely, what thoughts arise in your mind?

How do you respond emotionally?

What happens in your body?

Take time to meditate on these words and your response to them. And then consider how the Psalmist's experience of God's Presence and being totally known by God helps the writer to be more alert, awake and aware. And then reflect on how you can know a similar experience in your own life. End this listening part of your practice today by journaling any thoughts or experiences that you want to treasure, keep in mind, or return to later.

Friday

Return to the reflection at the start of this week, or to your notes from Sunday's sermon. Take note of anything new that may have stood out for you today. If you want to, you can spend your whole time working through what spoke to you. Or you can use the following questions to guide your prayer and meditation

: What role do awe and wonder play in your life?

How do they help you to be more alert to the signs of God's Presence in your world?

Now turn to **Psalm 8**.

Read through the passage once and then spend a minute or two in silence as you reflect on how it connects with this week's theme. Then read the passage through a second time, noticing anything new that may stand out in your reading. When you read how the Psalmist's experience and understanding of God and the world is affected by looking at the moon and stars, what thoughts arise in your mind? How do you respond emotionally?

What happens in your body?

Take time to meditate on these words and your response to them. And then consider how you can adopt the Psalmist's practice of looking at the moon and stars, the world around you, the findings of science and reports from news media to gain a deeper awareness of God's Presence in your world and in yourself. End this listening part of your practice today by journaling any thoughts or experiences that you want to treasure, keep in mind, or return to later.