



Week of Prayer
*A Guide for Individuals and
Small Groups*

PRAYER

Actively Waiting



The Evangelical Covenant Church

This week of prayer resource invites us to walk through the Old Testament and witness those who prayed prayers for protection, provision, peace, power, and promise. We will walk with those who asked for God's presence—to rescue them from pain or to fulfill his promise. Let us take notice of the posture of prayer that each one takes and how God answers.

Underscoring all of this is the promise that we, the family of God, share the blessed hope. Let us pray together and actively wait for the fulfillment of the promise of Christ's return and for the answers to our prayers.

DAY ONE:

The Posture of Prayer— Actively Waiting

READ: Isaiah 40:31

The pace of our over committed, roller coaster lives is crazy. So, what are we to do when we encounter the admonishment of Isaiah 40:31 to “wait on the Lord”? Wait? The very word “wait” shines unwelcome light on our empty storehouses of patience.

Waiting can be passive and sedentary, but it can also be active and engaged. Since the Hebrew word for “wait” in verse 31 actually means to “wait expectantly,” we understand Isaiah is calling us to actively wait on God.

The call to “active waiting” feels like a contradiction. However, consider a child waiting for Christmas morning or parents expecting their firstborn. Every fiber of their bodies is tense with anticipation, confident the outcome will be good. They actively wait!

In this sense, active waiting is not anxious but eager—it creates positive tension. It has confident hope without the falseness of a wish. This waiting has solidity without rigidity. Active waiting is full of promise but casts no shadow of doubt.

In the moments, hours, days, and sometimes years that hang suspended between the asking and the answering of a prayer, there is an invitation to live in the beautiful tension of active waiting. Much like the suspended moment when the trapeze artist releases one swing to grab on to another, active waiting hovers deliciously in simultaneous motion and stillness.

Our prayers do not evaporate off our lips like fog burning off the ocean in the sunshine. Nor do they fall on deaf ears. We offer them as worship and an expression of trust to Almighty God.

This week as we pray together, we will actively wait in confidence, knowing that the power and provision are in the waiting with God. The answers to our prayers are already resting in the heartbeat of God.

Listen

God is waiting patiently for you to separate yourself from the busyness of life. Today you are invited to rest within the heartbeat of the Holy Trinity. Listen. God is speaking. What is the Three in One saying to you?

Reflect

How have you actively waited on God? Are there areas of your life right now where you are actively waiting for God's movement? How do you handle the tension of active waiting?

Pray

Isaiah tells us those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. In what ways do you need the strength of God today? Pray and actively wait. Gain strength from the knowledge that God knows your heart and prayers.

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DAY TWO:

Praying for the Presence

READ: Psalm 51:9-12

Cravings. We often associate cravings with certain things like pickles and ice cream, chocolate, caffeine, or salty foods. Or perhaps we crave a much-needed vacation!

Consider the life of David. This great leader constantly craved the presence of the Lord. David's poetry is filled with the cries of a son for the presence of a beloved father. He articulates this most clearly in verse 11 when he pleads with God "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." When our children don't want us to go they cling to us and cry, "Stay! Please don't go." Their little bodies are taut with intention and desire to keep us, their source of safety and contentment, close to them. It is with this kind of desperation that David begs for God's presence.

We first meet King David as a young boy conquering the giant Goliath. Throughout David's life he wins, loses, fails, and triumphs. But even in the midst of his more notable failure with Bathsheba, David is at his very best when his longing for the presence of God overwhelms the depravity and desires of his own heart.

So it is with us. Perhaps if we spent more time longing for God's presence and less time asking for things, our days would be filled with the fullness of God's glory rather than the emptiness of our own desires.

Listen

Consider God's desire to have a close relationship with you. Listen carefully. You have not been merely invited over for dinner. Almighty God invites you to be a treasured, celebrated, beloved member of the family. God longs for your love in a deeper sense than you can imagine.

Reflect

In some relationships there might be a touch of fear of being left or abandoned. Even David feared God would reject him, cast him out. How does your fear, doubt, or distrust of God affect your confidence that your prayers will be answered? Remember that God is with you and loves you.

Pray

Pray today for the presence of God—but not as if presence were an object. Rather, be the presence of God, enveloped by the aroma of grace, love, forgiveness, and full acceptance. Pray and actively wait in anticipation and joy because you are loved by God.

DAY THREE:

Praying through the Pain

READ: Genesis 21:8-20

As a survivor of child abuse and having endured much pain at the hands of others, I would rather somebody cause me physical pain than torment me emotionally. In 2002, I made a connection between physical and emotional pain. The following is a January 2002 excerpt from my journal:

To Brittany (2 years old) from Mommy:

I will forever remember that day. On that day, the earth seemed to shudder to a stop and then change course, forever. After a doctor's appointment to see the cause of your high fever it is suggested that we have blood work done on you. Through a rapid course of events it is determined that you have leukemia. Cancer. One of the scariest words known to man (and to mom) suddenly becomes a familiar resident in our minds and mouths. You are VERY ill and your body is close to shutting down. We might lose you.

How did this happen to you, my sweet angel? Now you are not strong and lively, funny and silly. Now you are vulnerable, weak and fragile. Now I do not push you to play and explore, to be brave and adventurous. Now my heart holds you and protects you from all the elements in this world that can harm you. Sadly, the greatest enemy we fight lives deep within your bones and blood, out of the reach of my protective arms.

Now I know. One of the greatest pains a parent can endure is watching his or her child suffer. I cry with Hagar as she places her son beneath a bush to watch him die. I felt a bit like Hagar, watching my daughter endure chemotherapy, struggle to walk, eat, or sleep because of sores and pain. I prayed. Hagar prayed. You pray—knowing that whatever the outcome, God is with the one we are praying for, knowing that however deep our love is for another, God's love is deeper. And God always answers. Sometimes it seems the answer is so slow in coming. So we wait, confident our prayers do not fall to the ground but are caught and held to the heart of our Savior.

Listen

What are the sources of your pain? Not the symptoms (anger, frustration, stress, etc.) but the sources? Insecurity, rejection, loss, confusion. God wants to flood these gaping chasms of pain with light, strength, and peace. Listen to the dissonance between the soothing song of our Savior and our internal screeching of personal pain or the brokenness of our world.

Reflect

Which is easier? To trust God to heal your pain or to sit with your pain? What steps of faith give evidence to the fact that you truly trust God to heal and comfort you?

Pray

Pain is a natural response, a protective reflex. It can also be a barrier to the healing power of God. Pray and actively wait on God today to gently heal your pain so that the protective walls may fall, allowing others to see God at work in you.

DAY FOUR:

Praying for Provision

READ: 2 Kings 4:1-7

We were poor growing up. For my single mother good jobs, money, and hope were hard to come by. We had a dumpster-diving friend who would rescue produce that had been deemed unfit for sale. Our friend would take these rejects, place them on his big flatbed truck, and bring them to us.

When the trailer arrived, a flurry of activity followed because the decomposition of the food had already begun. We were on a race against time to clean and preserve it. The produce needed the “bad” parts cut off—the worm, the mold, the decay. It was not an especially pleasant—or appetizing—task.

Once the produce was hacked up and cleaned, the preserving process could begin. Canning. This was a tedious, lengthy process of boiling, seasoning, and sealing the hot jars to preserve the salvaged goodness. I spent many hours in the kitchen counting the “pop” of the jar lids to make sure each one sealed properly.

In our rustic cement basement that smelled of firewood, I loved to look at the colorful jars of preserved produce on the shelves. They were beautiful. I’ll be the first to admit that nothing beats homemade pickles, applesauce, peaches, and strawberry jam.

God’s provision doesn’t always fall in obvious fashion, like manna or quail from heaven. Sometimes it shows up like the little bit of oil in the widow’s jar. God used that oil to save the widow’s children from being enslaved to pay her debt. She had oil. We had a friend with spoiled food. Sometimes provision arises from the dust of what we think we don’t have.

Listen

Jesus’s great question, “What do you want?” challenges us to think about the specific ways we want God to provide. Listen. God wants to know what you are seeking.

Reflect

The widow brought her little bit of oil to the man of God and it was miraculously multiplied to provide what was needed for her family. Have you brought what you have, or are you hoarding it out of fear of having nothing if you give that little bit to God?

Prayer

Give thanks to God today for all that has been given to you. Pray and actively wait, asking God to answer your prayer for provision. God is willing to use what you have to serve holy purposes, if you will offer it up as a sacrifice.

DAY FIVE:

Praying for Peace

READ: Joshua 3

Peace. Do you have it? Do you need it? Can you find it? Peace often seems to be as elusive and rare as the Holy Grail or the fountain of youth.

For me, the pressure of starting a church, multiple parishioner tragedies, financial challenges, and a busy life with a houseful of teenagers all had my life balancing like a poorly stacked woodpile. Although I was upright and somewhat productive, it was clear to my pastor that the smallest upset in life could turn me into an unusable pile of rubble. So he instructed me—forcibly—to take some time to pray, reflect, and reassess life.

Truthfully, I spent the first week being angry at the circumstances that created a need for somebody else to take control over my life. However, the weeks that followed were invested in solitude, reflection, and prayer. I deeply needed peace of mind and soul. During that time I realized that peace is not the absence of struggle but what happens in the midst of it.

Consider the Israelites crossing into the Promised Land. After many decades an entire generation passed waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise. The raging river lay between them and the promise. Logic would say peace would be found in staying where they were. However, God told Joshua they were to cross the river to the other side. When the priests placed their feet into the water, as instructed by God, the river’s flow stopped and the nation of Israel crossed peaceably into God’s promise.

Peace is not trying to find a state of motionless serenity in the midst of a swirly river. Peace does not float mysteriously above the water in the mists of the roiling waves. Rather, peace rests with God and in the knowledge that one has sought and followed God’s instruction. Peace is found in obedience. Peace is found in waiting with God and living for God. Active waiting for the peace of God leads to the joy found on the other side of obedience.

Listen

Consider the challenges in your life, like the raging river of Joshua’s story, that threaten to overcome you and those around you. Listen. God calls to you over the waves of fear and panic. Reach out and grasp the nail-scarred hands of peace.

Reflect

Is God calling you to step out of familiar territory? Are you trusting God for an answer, or are you trying to swim the river on your own?

Pray

Pray today that you will have a heart of obedience and wisdom to follow God’s words. Pray that as you follow and serve God you will be a person and presence of God’s peace. Pray and actively wait for God’s peace.

DAY SIX:

Praying for Power

READ: 1 Kings 18:20-40

I was cruising across Montana—Big Sky Country. As I drove, it occurred to me that if I could turn back time one hundred years, some of the homesteads and unclaimed lands would probably look the same as they do today. The exception? Power lines and cell phone towers springing out of the landscape like an unwelcome crop of weeds.

The power lines, while a disruption to natural beauty, are evidence of the modern marvel of electricity. The world cannot deny its benefits. Those miles and miles of lines carry convenient, modern, and advanced communication to remote areas.

In your prayers, have you ever asked God for power? Maybe not literally but spiritually? I have many times. When I pray for power from heaven I would like God to answer with the same immediacy and definition as was done for Elijah on Mount Carmel—powerful fiery proof that God is almighty.

I define a life of prayer as being constantly connected to the source of power, love, and grace. When I get frustrated with a lackluster season in my spiritual life, I have to consider the possibility that my power lines of communication may be down. While God, our source, is consistent and always faithful, it is our responsibility and privilege to stay in the receiving mode, connected to the giver of life.

When Elijah prayed for power from God, he wasn't starting a new conversation. His request came in the middle of an already existing communicate with God. The power that we see displayed in the fire on Mount Carmel is an exclamation point in the middle of their pre-existing relationship. Power is not the result of prayer, it is found in the midst of our relationship with God.

Listen

Expecting an automobile to run when we haven't put fuel in it is foolishness. Just as foolish would be asking God for a powerful witness in our lives without staying relationally connected to him. How do you stay in relationship with God? God is speaking to you today. Listen.

Reflect

Sometimes we can hear the street lights buzz with electricity as they begin to light up the night. Both the sound and the light give evidence of power. What gives evidence in your life that you are connected to the source of all power and wisdom?

Pray

Consider the power of God and your connection to the source of power. Pray and actively wait for evidence of God in the everyday moments of your life.

DAY SEVEN:

Praying for the Promise

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Once, my sister promised to feed and visit my daughter's beloved cat while we were gone for a long vacation. But she forgot. Fortunately for the kids and our future family relationships, the cat was fine. We can't be the only family who has suffered a broken promise. It happens.

When a commitment is made to you and the words "I promise" are added to the statement, doesn't it feel as if the value of the words increases immensely? Ironically, the unseen currency of promises are made and exchanged between flawed, fragile humans. We fall prey to busy schedules, muddled intentions, and an occasional fragile sense of personal accountability.

So how can we trust the promises of God when our only frame of reference is flawed humanity? My prayer is that our confidence is bolstered by the stories of Hannah and Abraham who were promised and given a child, Noah who witnessed the promise to never see the world destroyed by flood again, and the Israelites who saw the Promised Land, not to mention the numerous fulfilled prophecies of the arrival of a Savior. God makes proper return on an invested word. Finally, since we bear historical witness to these promises through the word, how can we not be secure in the promise of the blessed hope? The promises of God will be kept.

Christ has died.

Christ has risen.

Christ will come again.

Listen

In Scripture, God promises to be ever present through the Holy Spirit. God promises to love us. God promises that our sins are forgiven through Christ and that if we believe we will have a place in heaven. Do you believe God's promises? Listen. God is reminding you of all the promises that have been made and kept in Scripture. Give God thanks for all that has been done.

Reflect

Are you angry or frustrated with God because a promise has not been fulfilled in your family, church, community, or world? Remember and be thankful for God's faithfulness, wisdom, and loving presence.

Pray

Pray for the confidence, strength, wisdom, and patience to wait for God to keep the promises of the word. Pray that the church will be an accurate, consistent representation of God as a promise giver and keeper. Pray and actively wait with God.