

Growth Group Homework

For the week of October 5-10, 2018

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. What has been a recent high point and low point in your life?
2. If you are at the zoo, what animal do you enjoy watching most and why?

DIGGING DEEPER QUESTIONS

1. Please read the scripture we have heard this week again and share with your group what came up to your mind.

Scripture: Luke 22:54-62 (NRSV)

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not!’

“Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, ‘Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about!’ At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

2. We all have moments of weakness where we struggle, have doubt and despair. Think of a time in your spiritual walk that you denied Jesus.
3. The path of discipleship has ups and downs, pain and suffering. How have you experienced discipleship as a lifelong process of discovery with its ups and downs?
4. Jesus knew and prayed for our failure but also for our next step, giving us a new mission and renewed call. Read Luke 22:32. What does the Jesus’ prayer mean to you?

Scripture: Luke 22:32 (NRSV)

“But I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Prayer Requests:



Growth Group Community Service Project

We ask every group to take on at least one service project a year (the ideal is two) and to have at least one social gathering (potluck) per half a year. Please consider with your group members of what community service you’d like to participate in. There is a project list made by our church that you can join in and outside the church.

Spiritual Discipline of the Week

Fasting

When the season of Lent approaches, many people choose to give up something for the season. They practice a form of self-denial in which they abstain from something they enjoy, such as tea or coffee or chocolate. Their form of self-denial is a way to follow Christ in a deeper devotion.

Fasting is a larger spiritual discipline than the seasonal practice of Lent. Jesus spoke of fasting in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18), and we know that fasting was well established in his time. Isaiah 58:6-8 describes false and true worship, including these words: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (NRSV) John Wesley first fasted two days a week, and then began to fast from Thursday tea until Friday tea. He also fasted, however, before receiving Holy Communion to focus his attention on God, and he asked other Methodists to follow this example.

Simply put, fasting is a twofold act of abstaining from food for a designated period and increasing time in prayer. Traditional practice in Christianity has set that period as one day, often understood as one day a week. Tradition calls us to follow the teaching of Jesus and not call attention to ourselves during any time of fasting.

This ancient understanding of fasting includes prayer as a guard against gluttony and impure words, thoughts and deeds. Eastern Orthodox church tradition also calls for an increase of almsgiving and acts of compassion or mercy to those who are poor. Simply giving up food alone does not make a fast.

Fasting without prayer may lead to the spiritual sin of pride. So when you fast, focus on God and repent, as well as pray for others and act in charity and kindness toward others. Think of engaging in fasting as a spiritual practice. If you are in good health, commit to fasting one day a week for a month. Pray during the time that you would spend in meals and use the extra time to minister to those in need.

If you have health considerations that keep you from abstaining from food for a day, offer an alternative fast to God. Consider fasting from social networks, such as Twitter or Facebook, for one day a week. Or abstain from apathy and engage in ministries for others. Plan to fast from talking and go without speaking for a day, using the time for prayer and devotion.

Remember that fasting and prayer go together. Fasting is not an easy practice and demands prayer. As with other spiritual practices, especially contemplative prayer, many distractions will come and try to change your resolve. Deal with the distractions by saying, "Yes, I do need to XYZ, and I will do that when I am finished with this fast (or this time of prayer)." Note the distraction and continue with your disciplined practice of fasting. May you enjoy a humble fast and produce fruit for the sake of Christ.

The Rev. Brad Gray is the pastor of St. Andrews Parish United Methodist Church in Charleston, South Carolina.