

saint mary's press

BY MY SIDE

A Teen Prayer Companion

Victoria Shepp

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Introduction

By My Side: A Teen Prayer Companion was designed to provide you with an opportunity to be nourished, inspired, and challenged by Scripture. As people of faith, we are called to use Scripture for guidance and growth. The hope is that this resource will help you do this in a way that brings meaning and insight to the experiences of your life.

This resource can be used in a variety of ways. You can start any time in the year and follow the reflections day by day, or you can use the index in the back to focus your reflection on specific topics or issues that may be of particular interest to you.

If you like to write, keeping a journal can be a good companion to this resource. If you like to read, you can delve into the Bible more deeply by exploring larger portions of the Scripture identified each day. If you like music, let some quiet, reflective melodies or your favorite songs from church or youth ministry accompany you as you read. And if you are hurried and have little time, drop this resource in your backpack, keep it on your nightstand, or find a place where you might be able to access it for a quick reflection at the most convenient time. Regardless of how you approach it, the amount of time you have, or your knowledge of Scripture, this resource will help you begin a yearlong journey of growing in faith.

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New Year, Same You?

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

(2 Corinthians 5:1)

This may seem like a heavy verse to begin a new year, but it helps us to remember that it is not the outer body that matters, but the inner self. It's common to make New Year's resolutions to eat less or to change the way we look or act. Maybe this is the year to start looking inward at our relationship with God. As we evaluate the previous year and start planning for a brand new one, we can take the time to focus on our relationship with God and with our faith community. We can ask ourselves, as we set our New Year goals: What is my relationship with God? How often am I spending time in prayer and reflection?

God, help me to turn my attention to our relationship in this new year, making it strong and faith-filled.

Confidence from Christ

Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward.

(Hebrews 10:35)

If we have confidence in Christ, we are able to have confidence in ourselves. The unknown author who wrote to the Hebrews in the first century after Jesus' death encouraged those early believers to remain confident in Christ. This confidence, which we too can enjoy as Christians, has its rewards: a community of faith to journey with, a loving God to turn to, and the assurance that we can stand tall as followers of Christ. Do you put your confidence in Christ and his gifts? Can you draw on that confidence to develop your own self-esteem?

Christ, in whom I put my confidence, help me to find confidence in myself.

Accepting Others

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

(John 4:27)

We may expect our friends to stay within our own group. We might even ask, "Why are you speaking with her?" if a friend talks to someone outside our circle. Jesus' followers might have had that question when they saw him sitting with a woman—a woman who was outcast by her society. But they knew better than to ask. Jesus had let them know that he needed to share himself with others, even outsiders like this woman he met at the well. We too need to be willing to share ourselves with outsiders. And if we ever feel like an outsider ourselves, we can know that Jesus sits and shares himself with us just as he did with the woman at the well.

Christ who sits with all, help me to be accepting of others and to know that no matter what you accept me.

What's a Friend to Do?

One who forgives an affront fosters friendship,
but one who dwells on disputes will alienate
a friend.

(Proverbs 17:9)

An affront can be an insult, a disrespectful action, or something that causes injury. Unfortunately our friends sometimes do hurt us in these ways. It is only human to want to retaliate, but the writer of Proverbs advises us to forgive. The writer knows that if we do not forgive, if we dwell on the affront, we alienate that friend. Although we may struggle to forgive serious injuries, many of the things that make us mad are minor. Is there someone you need to forgive in order to foster a friendship? If so, how can you express forgiveness? Do you need to ask for forgiveness? In either case, fostering a friendship is worth the effort.

*Christ, my friend, forgive me if I have insulted you,
and help me to foster friendship by forgiving others
and asking for forgiveness as I need it.*

Go against the Flow

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

(Romans 12:2)

Sometimes others try to persuade us to do or say something that does not reflect our true and best self. Sometimes we respond to this pressure by acting like one of the crowd yet wondering if we really should be succumbing to pressure this way. At those times, we can recall Paul's words to the Romans and ask ourselves: Am I just conforming to the standard of my peers? Is this action "good and acceptable and perfect"? These questions can help us to discern the will of God.

God, my guide, help me to learn to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect, and to strive to do these things.

How Would I Treat Christ?

But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

(1 Corinthians 8:12)

When Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, he was helping them learn how to be followers of Christ, living in community. He knew it was hard not to fall into temptation or to tempt others. He also gave instructions on family life. He tells the Corinthians that if they sin against others or cause others to sin, they are sinning against Christ. When we regularly spend time with people, we can easily fall into bad behaviors: we can be mean to family members, lead them into a fight, or be disrespectful. Before we do something that might fall into those categories, we can ask ourselves, Is this the way I would treat Christ? Our answer can lead us to take the right action.

Christ, my brother, help me to treat my whole family with the same love I have for you.

Keeping Our Way Pure

How can young people keep their way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.

(Psalm 119:9)

When we are tempted, we may not remember what we can do to reduce the temptation. However, this psalm verse gives us a way to resist the temptation of impure actions. When we are faced with temptation, we might find help in remembering the psalmist's advice and guarding our actions according to God's Word. We can learn a phrase or two from Scripture to recall in a moment of temptation—or better yet, before that moment arrives. Listening to God's Word and repeating a memorized verse to ourselves may keep us from temptation and guard our way through life.

Dear God, help me to keep my way pure and to ensure that my actions are always according to your Word.

Cyberbullying in Scripture?

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

(Luke 6:31)

Although Jesus never witnessed cyberbullying, he knew that people did not always treat one another well. He gave us clear instructions about how to treat one another. There is no way around it: bullying is wrong. Although we may not be the one doing the bullying or the one being bullied, we do have a responsibility to speak out against it, report it, and be sure it is stopped. If we truly want to “do unto others,” that means we never bully, and we never encourage bullying. It also means we do something about it because we’d want someone else to do that for us.

Compassionate Lord, help me to have compassion for those around me and to be a voice for those who need help.

Lions and Tigers and Tests

Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have
rescued me.

(Psalm 22:21)

Most of us do not have lions or wild oxen to worry about. But we do have the perils of modern life, which may sometimes seem just as daunting. As we face those things that scare us, we join others in a long tradition of calling on God. People of faith, like the psalmist, have always asked God to intervene. We can prepare for stressful challenges like studying for tests. We can make smart choices to help us stay safe, like wearing seat belts, choosing not to smoke, and making friends with people who do the same. Still, when faced with something scary, it is nice to know that our cry for help will be heard.

*To you, my God, I lift my voice and know that you will
be there to hear me.*

Turning My Cheek

But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. . . .

(Matthew 5:39)

When we hear the instruction to turn the other cheek, we start to understand why some people thought Jesus was a radical. In Jesus' time it was common to think of "an eye for an eye" as a response to wrongdoing, so his teachings were as radical then as they are today. So what can we do about violence when we encounter it? We can indeed turn the other cheek and not hit back when hit, but we can also be the ones, like Jesus, who build the path for peace. Do you lash out in words or actions when others harm you? Do you hit your brother or sister when you fight? Do you play too rough on the ball field? Being a person of peace may be a little more difficult than it first sounds.

Gentle God of peace, help me to be peaceful in my thoughts and actions.

Living Faith

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

(Romans 8:2)

Most of us know the difference between right and wrong. We have received clear teachings from parents, teachers, and the Church. Complex issues may present gray areas, but most of our daily moral decisions are black and white. Even though our values are shaped by our faith, our family, and our community, we still make bad choices and do the wrong thing at times. But if our faith points us to our values, our faith can also help us to live them out. We are filled with grace when we experience God's forgiveness through the Sacraments. And we are blessed to be able to turn to the Word of God, which assures us that when we focus on living our life with the guidance of the Spirit, we really are set free from the law of sin.

Living God, be with me as I make decisions, and help me to live my faith and values in the law of the Spirit.

Feeling Lovesick?

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

(Song of Solomon 2:7)

When we have a crush on someone, we want to rush into love, awaken it, and stir it up. Rushing love places pressure on us and on the object of our affection. When we think constantly about another person, we can lose ourselves. We might make poor decisions just to enjoy that feeling of being in love. Before rushing into love, it can be helpful to ask ourselves: Am I only in love with the idea of love? Do I know what I'm getting myself into? Do I know that this person will respect me? Listening to the answers to these questions can help to slow us down and allow love to come when it is ready.

God, who loves me forever, teach me to love tenderly and to not rush into anything. May I wait until love is ready for me and I am ready for it.

Doubts?

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

(John 20:29)

We Christians are asked to do something rather difficult: believe in something we cannot see. Thomas is often referred to as the original "doubter"; after the Resurrection, he needed to put his hands in Jesus' wounds in order to believe. Jesus says that we are blessed because we believe without seeing, but how can we believe in what we do not see? When we find ourselves doubting, we can remember what Jesus told Thomas about those who believe without seeing, and let ourselves be blessed.

Jesus, who helped Thomas to believe, help me to believe. May I tell others about you, the most powerful force in my life.

What Do You Value?

To whom will you liken me and make me equal,
and compare me, as though we were alike?

(Isaiah 46:5)

As Christians we say that God is important. But what else do we value? We may place more value on our electronics and technology than on God; we may place more value on sports or a movie star; we may place more value on things, forgetting that the one who made us is the one with the highest value. Are you putting things above God? Are you spending too much time or money on things in comparison to the amount of time you spend in prayer, praise, and serving God? If the answer to these questions is yes, it's time to turn the tables on what you value.

*You, my God, are more precious than anything else.
Help me to remember to place you higher than all of
my things.*

Applying Ourselves

If you are willing, my child, you can be disciplined,
and if you apply yourself you will become
clever.

(Sirach 6:32)

Not everyone can get straight A's, be at the top of the class, or excel in every subject. But we all can and should do our best. The wise words of Sirach remind us of a simple strategy: applying ourselves. We do not need to rank first in all that we do, but as a way to honor God we should be doing our best. Having discipline and applying ourselves does not guarantee straight A's, but Sirach assures us that we will become clever. As we plan our time, we can ask ourselves: Am I taking time to study? Am I doing my best? What am I learning that will help me in the future?

God of wisdom, help me to be disciplined in my studies so that I may be wise in your ways.

Put Away Anger

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:31–32)

As members of a Christian community, we are called to love one another. Although we may become angry at times, we need to try to put anger aside and strive to be kind. This can be difficult to do, especially in a family or community. When we are close to people, it is easy to get angry. But closeness also allows us to be tenderhearted and forgiving. Putting away anger requires us to ask questions like: Am I holding on to anger that I should let go of? Can I put this aside and concentrate on the good in the person or situation?

Lord, make me to be like you, slow to anger and quick to forgive.

Promises, Promises

I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

(Genesis 9:13)

We make promises all the time: promises to clean our rooms, call a friend, or help a sibling. We rarely make promises we do not intend to keep. God provided a sign of the covenant he made at the time of Noah. The rainbow was a sign that God would never again flood the earth to destroy it. Signs help make our promises real. For Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, a hand sign represents the Scout Promise. When we pass our drivers' test, our license is a sign of our commitment to obey the traffic laws. What if we had a sign for all of our promises? The next time we make a promise, we might consider creating some sort of sign that helps to make it real.

God, you've kept your promises to your people; help me to keep my promises, and inspire me to remember the importance of the commitments I make.

Christ Can Calm Us

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

(Mark 4:39)

Christ has the power to calm a stormy sea, yet we sometimes forget to call on him when we are in far less serious situations. The disciples called on him, and he took care of them. He does that for us too when we call on him. Sometimes we get so caught up in an issue or problem that we forget to call on God. When we find ourselves getting overly stressed or concerned about something, it helps to ask, Can I call on God to help me here? We know that the answer is yes. Calling on the calming power of the Risen Christ can be calming in itself. Calling on him will provide even more calm, as the disciples in the boat found out on that stormy night.

Christ, who calms the sea, be near me when I cry out to you in times of stress.

Followers Then and Now

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

(Acts of the Apostles 2:42)

When we think about what it means to be Christian, we might think of wearing a cross or crucifix, or blessing ourselves with holy water as we enter a church. These are things we do to show we are Christian, but we also must act as Christians. The earliest followers of Christ, as recorded in Acts, were given some clear instructions. Do you devote time to learning about your faith and the Bible? Do you spend time with other Christians sharing faith? Do you participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and actively pray with the community? Do you pray on your own? These key elements of the Christian life were essential to the first followers of Christ and are essential for us today.

Risen Lord, help me to always show my Christian identity through my actions.

Grand Forgiveness

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."

(Luke 23:34)

We are often challenged to forgive others. When someone's actions or words offend us, we may want to be angry rather than offer the offender forgiveness. When we feel hurt, it is hard to forgive. Jesus gives us the ultimate example of forgiveness during his Passion. As he was being crucified, he forgave his executioners. How can we learn from this example and find strength to forgive those who offend us? As we feel our injury, and experience betrayal, we can answer these questions: Am I going to let this action or experience separate me from the God who forgives? Can I be like Christ and forgive this person?

Christ my Savior, you died on the cross for us and showed us what forgiveness means. I thank you and praise you, and I seek your guidance in becoming a person of forgiveness like you.

Washing Feet

“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

(John 13:14)

Jesus gives us many examples of service. He healed the sick, made the blind see, and restored dignity to outcasts. We learn that we too are called to be people of service in his example of washing the disciples’ feet. Performing the task of a servant, Jesus sets his followers on the path of service. Many people serve us, and many provide inspiring examples of serving others. When do you serve out of love? How can you follow Jesus’ example of humble service? Who in your community needs your service so that they too may follow Jesus?

Although I may never wash anyone’s feet, I thank you, Christ, for reminding me to do as you did and to serve others humbly.

Happy Company

Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.

(Psalm 40:4)

God created us to be social, and when we choose our group of friends, we have multiple options. We can choose a group that supports a healthy, holy lifestyle, or we can choose a group that does not. If we choose people who “go astray after false gods” like material objects, premarital sex, or illegal substances, we will find ourselves surrounded by those who experience what they think is happiness, but discover that it is fleeting and mostly false. When choosing companions, it is helpful to ask ourselves: Are these the type of people who know and walk with God? Or will they go after the false gods who lead me away from true happiness in God?

God in whom I place my trust, I turn to you and ask that you inspire me to choose friends who walk with you.

Wishing or Hoping

. . . and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

(Romans 5:5)

We might wish we were taller, wish we would win the lottery, or wish the superintendent would cancel school, but we know such wishes are a little fanciful. When we have hope that is rooted in our faith, however, we know it will not fail us. We can draw on hope because of God's love for us. We who hope in God do so with the knowledge that God provides what we need. Most important, we hope in Christ's Resurrection, and we know that this hope will not disappoint us. So when we use the word *hope*, let's be sure we are not confusing it with *wish*.

Christ, who is risen from the dead, help me to focus on a hope rooted in God's love for me, rather than on my fanciful wishes.

Big Love

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

We may think we see true love when we see that couple at school always attached at the hip or when we watch a romantic movie. But true love is much more than romance and googly eyes. True love is godly. None of us will likely have to sacrifice the way Jesus did when he died on the cross, but we will have to make sacrifices for love. We might know of parents who have sacrificed to give their child a particular opportunity, or of a teacher who has sacrificed time for her students. When we find ourselves thinking about love, we can ask: Is this a godly love? Am I willing to make sacrifices for this love?

God of sacrificial love, help me to keep your ultimate act of love as the inspiration for how I love others.

Drawing on Hope

You said, "Woe is me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest."

(Jeremiah 45:3)

We sometimes feel like we're being hit while we're down. We might feel that God is not listening or is not even near. We understand the words of Jeremiah, who does not see or feel God's presence. Although we feel as if no one is listening or caring, we can rest assured that there is hope. This hope becomes important in moments of pain. By drawing on that hope, we become like Jeremiah, who was later able to move through pain and suffering. Like Jeremiah we can find light at the end and see that God was indeed with us through it all.

God who knows my deepest suffering, gently remind me of your presence and show me your light.

Accepting All

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

(Galatians 3:28)

If we rewrote this passage for today's young people, how would it sound? This rewording might help us to imagine what being accepted by all and accepting all would look like in our daily life. But wanting to be accepted can sometimes get in the way of accepting others. Are there any people that you don't accept? What are the reasons you are not accepting them? Do you really want to act this way, or are you doing it to be accepted by others? By answering such questions, we can see what our motivation is and remind ourselves that just as we want acceptance, so do others. If we strive to accept others, we may find acceptance for who we truly are.

God of love, who accepts me just as I am, help me to be accepting of others, and let my motivation be guided by your ways.

Creator God

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

(Genesis 1:31)

We know God likes the results of his creative work. God said after each day that the new creation was good. We can look around at the earth and sky, animals and plants, planets and stars and know that they are good. What about when we look in the mirror or look at another person? Do we know that what we see is good too? If we take the words of Genesis to heart, we must definitely believe that we are good too. Our essential goodness is sometimes hidden deep within, but we know that God loves all of his creations. God loves the earth and sea and sky. God loves the animals and plants and all the critters. And God most certainly loves us and knows we are very good.

Creator God, help me to remember my goodness and the goodness of others.

Moses Is Called

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses! And he said, "Here I am."

(Exodus 3:4)

We might think Moses is lucky because God so clearly called him. God does not seem to use burning bushes to call followers today. However, God does call each of us. God has given each of us a purpose, just like Moses. Perhaps God does give us our own version of a burning bush, but we may walk by it if we do not take time to listen for him. We need to pay attention to know what God is calling us to do. One way to begin to develop attentiveness is to practice just listening, sitting in quiet. Instead of asking questions, we can take some time this day to be still and listen

Here I am, Lord, listening for your call.

Jesus' Mission Is Ours

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

(Luke 4:18–19)

Jesus announces his mission in a way that inspires us to follow his example. When we look around, we see physically poor people who have no food and shelter, and spiritually poor people who have no faith. We see captives of abuse, self-hatred, and addiction. We know that there are visually blind people and others who refuse to see the beauty of life. The oppressed may be modern-day slaves or victims of bullying. Whatever we see, when we hear Jesus' mission we must ask ourselves: What am I doing to help others? How can I be like Jesus right here and right now?

Jesus, my brother, may I follow your lead and help others in need.

Creation Needs Us

Praise the Lord! . . .
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

(Psalm 148:1,9–10)

Animals, plants, earth, and sky would praise God if they could speak. However, would all of creation praise us humans? We do not always treat creation with the love and care it deserves. The earth and all its inhabitants—animal and plant—are part of God’s creation, and we are called to be caretakers, good stewards. Unfortunately we sometimes act as if the earth and its inhabitants exist just for us to use and abuse. Are you a good steward of God’s creation? Are you doing your part to care for God’s creation so future generations will benefit from your actions?

God of all creation, help me to be a good steward, and may those who step on earth benefit from my actions.

I Am Wonderfully Made

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.

Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

(Psalm 139:13–14)

If we really believed that God made us wonderfully, we would not worry about who we are. When we look in the mirror and see our faults, when we fail to make a team, or when we struggle with a certain subject, it is easy to forget the psalmist's words. God does make us wonderfully, although it may take time to figure out who God intends us to be. Are you trying to be the person *you* want to be or the person God means for you to be? As that answer begins to reveal itself to us, we are able to become who we truly are, the person God intends us to be.

God who created me, may I become aware of just how wonderfully you made me; may I learn to live as the wonderful person you intend me to be.

Facing Authority

“When you stand before him, have no fear in your heart, but tell him what you have just said, and he will treat you well.”

(Judith 10:16)

During an armed conflict, the enemy commander’s guards advised Judith to face their leader with self-assurance. We can have that same assurance when we need to face someone in authority. We can talk to the principal of our school, a civic leader, or a potential boss with confidence if we can prepare ahead of time. We can review the purpose of the meeting, plan what we will say, and consider how to show respect. If we properly prepare for an encounter, we boost our self-esteem. The next time we have an appointment with an authority figure, we can ask ourselves: Am I standing tall because I am prepared and respectful? Does my self-esteem show in my interactions?

Lord, help me to grow in confidence and self-esteem so that I may respectfully face and interact with authority figures.

No Hostility

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

(Ephesians 2:14)

Accepting others means we have to break down dividing walls, just as the early Christians, Jews, and Gentiles did. We have to rely on the love of God to help us be one and to remove the barriers that get in the way of unity. Sometimes we create these barriers. Sometimes others create them. Regardless of the source, removing the hostility is essential to creating peace. If we look at those we have not accepted and ask ourselves, Can I do something to break down the barrier standing between me and that person or group? we can come closer to knowing what barrier stands in the way of acceptance.

Lord, who loves all equally, help me to remove the barriers that are keeping me from fully accepting others.

A Real Friend

And there are friends who sit at your table, but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.

(Sirach 6:10)

We sit with a group of friends during lunch. These friends may or may not be the same friends that will be at our side when we really need them. Likewise we may be willing to have fun with friends, but if we have to choose between helping them and doing something fun, what happens? If we want to have good friends, we need to *be* good friends. We also need to choose friends carefully. Having many friends is not as important as having true friends. Before calling someone a friend, we can ask ourselves: Am I willing to give up something fun to help this person? Do I think this person would be willing to do that for me?

Holy Spirit, inspire me to be the type of friend who is willing to stand by the side of my friends, and inspire me to choose friends who would do the same for me.

Walking with the Wise

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.

(Proverbs 13:20)

Choosing which group to walk with can be tricky. We may think that by walking with the “cool kids,” we will automatically be cool; we may base our choice of friends solely on image. The writer of Proverbs reminds us that our choice should not be about who is “cool” or not, but that we are best served by choosing to walk with those who have wisdom. Are you walking with certain people because of their image, or because you will become a better, wiser person by being friends with them?

God of all wisdom, I desire to learn your ways and to become wiser and closer to you. Help me choose to walk with the wise rather than be a companion to the foolish.

Honoring Parents

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

(Exodus 20:12)

We know we should honor our parents. We have learned the Ten Commandments, and we know that they call us to honor our parents. Yet we often find ourselves ignoring our parents at best and outright dishonoring them at worst. This commandment reminds us to evaluate our relationship with our parents. Thinking about how we treat them can also help us to identify issues we need to talk to them about. For example, we might ask: Why do I get mad at my mom when she asks me about homework? Is it because I feel guilty that I have not done it well? Is it because I feel she distrusts me? If we can learn to have good conversations with our parents, we will be much more likely to honor them.

God, my most loving parent, help me to honor my parents and know that as I do this, I honor you.

Faithful to Abstaining

The Lord loves those who hate evil;
he guards the lives of the faithful;
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.

(Psalm 97:10)

Our Church teaches us to abstain from sexual activity until we are married. Although we should not judge or wish punishment on others, we can be certain that there are rewards for being faithful. The psalmist assures us that God guards those who are faithful to his ways. God will help us if someone is tempting or pressuring us to participate in sexual activity. That person may not be wicked, but her or his actions might be leading us to sin. So calling on God in times of sexual temptation and pressure may help.

God, I know you want me to abstain from sexual activity. Give me strength to continue to resist temptation.

Group Bullying

From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."

(John 19:12)

Sometimes it is easy to get caught up in making fun of someone or in making someone feel like an outsider. We are more like Pilate than we may want to admit when we participate in this kind of bullying. Like Pilate, we may allow the crowd to persuade us, or even incite us. Going along with a mean-spirited crowd is just as hurtful as being mean all on our own. When the crowd is laughing, we can make sure we are not taking part in bullying by asking ourselves the simple question, How would I feel if everyone was laughing at me?

Lord of compassion, help me to be aware of my actions when I am in a group.

God Is Near

Do not fear, for I am with you.

(Isaiah 43:5)

We all experience fear. Some of us fear dogs or spiders, or we may fear speaking out in class, or fear losing someone close to us. Some fears can keep us safe, like the fear of being hit by a car when we cross the street, but other fears can prevent us from growing and developing into the person God calls us to be. We can listen to our healthy fears, and we can also trust God when we feel afraid of things we cannot control. God wants us to know that when we experience fear we are not alone. The next time we are afraid for a big or small reason, we can remember Isaiah's words and know that God is indeed near.

God, who comforts me, help me to remember that you are near during those times I feel afraid.

Violence-Free

A violent tempered person will pay the penalty.

(Proverbs 19:19)

Most of us have learned from an early age that we need to use words instead of our fists when expressing anger. If we see violence, we need to report it. If we get so mad we want to be violent, we need to step away, and maybe even seek help. Not only will violence get us in trouble, it is against God's Law. When we are caught up in anger and feel it growing, it can be helpful to ask ourselves: Why am I so mad? What other action can I take? Who can I talk with about this situation? Answering those questions can help us to slow our anger and deal with it in a more productive way.

God of peace, help me to walk in peace and to help others do so as well.

Shared Values

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

(1 Peter 3:8)

We hear a lot of talk about values. School communities may talk about common values, politicians talk about American values, and our families base decisions and rules on their own set of values. Our Church teaches us the values we share as Christians. Working together to live out and develop these shared values builds community. We each need to find groups of people who help us live as faith-filled Christians. When we find these groups and surround ourselves with people who share the same values, we can strengthen the values that are so important to us and that bind us together as a community of faith.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three in One, help me to find others that walk in your ways as I try to bring my Christian values and faith to life.

Dating and Faith

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother
and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

(Genesis 2:24)

God provides a way for couples to become one. Beautiful things come from great relationships, and we likely want to experience all those things for ourselves. We need to remember that marriage, becoming one, is a sacramental privilege. Dating is a way to discover what kind of person we want to enter into this Sacrament with. If we consider dating as part of how we live our faith, then we can anticipate and look forward to becoming one with another, but we don't need to rush it. We can use dating to find someone who supports and encourages our faith. Dating may test our faith at times, but dating can reinforce our faith as well.

*God, I look forward to knowing what or whom you
have in store for me.*

Seeing Faith

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

(Hebrews 11:1)

We modern people are not much different from our ancestors in faith. We have a desire to touch and see proof of things before believing in them. Our ancestors in faith also wanted proof. They, like us, had to rely on believing in what they hoped for and maintain the conviction of things not seen. As the wind blows, we have evidence that air surrounds us. As God moves in us and throughout the world, we believe in his presence with more and more assurance. What things do you believe in that you cannot see? Can you apply that same faith to your belief in God?

God, who shows us the unseen, help me to have faith in you and your ways.

Sell It All?

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

(Mark 10:21)

Jesus does not want us to be poor, but he does want us to know that money is not important for salvation. Faith and generosity are more important than wealth and prestige. Getting into the Kingdom of Heaven is more important than getting into high-end restaurants or stores. By asking ourselves how we spend our money, and by keeping our focus on Jesus' teachings, we stay on track with the requirements of our faith. No matter what our circumstances, we will do well to follow Jesus' instructions and use our gifts to help those who are poor.

Generous God, help me to focus more on you than on riches; may I be generous to others in whatever way I am able.

Saint Valentine's Day

Love is patient; love is kind: love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

(1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

Even if we do not have a special someone in our life this Valentine's Day, we can still take today to practice patience, kindness, openness, humility, and courtesy. As we are surrounded by modern signs of love, such as hearts and flowers, chocolate and kisses, we might think that love is the same as romance. But Paul's signs of love will stand the test of time. Today we can challenge ourselves to be patient toward someone, to be kind, to compliment someone sincerely, to be humble, and to be polite. When we choose to treat people in this way, we will experience what the spirit of love really feels like.

God of love, teach me to love as you do, patiently, kindly, and without envy or arrogance.

Planning

Commit your work to the Lord,
and your plans will be established.

(Proverbs 16:3)

When we want to succeed in school, in sports, in music, or in other endeavors, we may experience pressure. If we see how these daily events and activities fit into God's desire for us and take time to plan, we benefit with less stress and better results. Because we place such high expectations on ourselves at times, good planning skills can help us to meet those expectations. As we work toward our goals, we can ask ourselves: Is this a plan that the Lord will smile on? Will it help me in my relationship with God? with others? Will it bring me closer to my goals?

*Lord of good work, I make this prayer in your name.
May I set realistic expectations for myself, plan well,
and keep on your path.*

Slow to Anger

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

(James 1:19–20)

We all know people with short fuses. They are quick to anger, they do not listen well, and they fly off the handle with angry words or even violent actions. Sometimes we call them "hotheads." The author of this New Testament letter advises us to have long fuses or fuses that do not light at all. It can be helpful to ask ourselves questions like these: Am I really listening, or am I busy coming up with my own reply? Can I slow my anger down to hear what this person is saying, and think before I respond? If we can slow ourselves down, either by thinking about these questions or by simply counting to ten, we will be able to more easily follow the instructions we find in this Scripture verse.

I am thankful that you, gentle God, are slow to anger and quick to listen. Help me to be more like you and less like a hothead.

Promises Made

If you will only obey the Lord your God . . . the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God.

(Deuteronomy 28:1)

When we keep our commitments to God, we can expect positive outcomes. God follows through on his promise to bless us, and the result is a win-win situation. If we can carry this type of win-win thinking into all of our commitments with others, we may receive the same positive outcomes. Making agreements and keeping them can be two very different things. Have you ever let others down by not following through?

*May I keep my commitments just as you keep yours,
God of promise and blessing.*

Protect Me, O God

Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
protect me from those who rise up against
me.

(Psalm 59:1)

We know that there are safe places like storm shelters, hurricane routes, and well-designed buildings that can withstand earthquakes. And we know that there are safe places where we can be ourselves, such as a counselor's office, a grandparent's living room, or our best friend's house. God also gives us a safe place where we can go, no matter where we may be physically. This safe place can be found in moments of prayer when we turn to God and ask for protection, strength, and love.

O Holy Protector, shelter me from things and people that are trying to harm me. Be my safe harbor in times of trouble.

Choices

Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

(Hebrews 2:18)

When we are young, temptation may come in the form of the cookie jar or our sister's unlocked diary. As we get older, many more temptations face us. Life becomes more complex as temptations become more significant. Developing a way to manage temptations is a life skill that will help now and in the future. When making a decision about right and wrong, we can ask ourselves questions like these: If I make this choice, can I tell my parents about it without making up a story? Would I make this choice if my grandmother was watching? In some cases, those questions are easy to answer. If we begin by practicing on minor or easy decisions, making the right choice with more serious temptations may become easier.

Good and gracious God, I turn to you in times of temptation. May your grace and strength aid me as I make tough choices.

Forgiving Family

“So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way [Joseph] reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

(Genesis 50:21)

Siblings can make us feel weak, small, insignificant, or unintelligent. If we have older siblings, we might strive to keep up with them. If we have younger siblings, we might make them feel inadequate or unwelcome. The story of Joseph and his brothers reminds us of the deep bonds that siblings have with one another. Even after they had treated him so poorly, Joseph forgives his brothers and even takes care of them when he is an adult. As we reflect on our own relationship with siblings, we can ask: Have I treated my siblings fairly? Have they done something I need to forgive?

Protect my siblings, and make me a good example, friend, and companion to them. I make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, my brother.

To Do Justice

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

(Micah 6:8)

When we clean up a beach or serve a meal in a shelter or write letters to end human trafficking, we are following in Jesus' footsteps of service. Often we think service includes only those things that directly help someone. Although service can be direct social service—like reading to children at a hospital—it can also be working toward social change—like calling for wider access to health care. Direct social service is called charity, and working toward social change is called justice. Both work together: through our charity work, we help individuals meet their basic needs, and through the work of justice, we help to correct long-term problems in communities.

As I walk humbly with you, Lord, help me to be a person of service and justice.

Peace and Happiness

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

(Philippians 4:9)

Some happy people have a secret that can benefit us. The secret is that they are filled with the peace of God. When we are filled with God's peace, we are able to experience happiness more fully. The writer of this New Testament letter urges the Philippians to remain faithful to the Gospel they have received. What is keeping you from knowing God's peace right now? Have you turned away from what you have learned and received from the Church? When we are faithful to the Gospel, we find the peace of God and our happiness grows.

God of peace and happiness, let me be with you in peace so I may be open to the happiness that flows from you.

Why Hope?

The king came down to him and said, "This trouble is from the Lord! Why should I hope in the Lord any longer?"

(2 Kings 6:33)

Do you ever feel as if some of your troubles come from God? As we try to become better followers of Christ, we may experience times when it seems like our lives are complicated by being Christian. It might even tempt us to lose faith or hope. Friends who do not understand our desire to live a Christian life may turn away from us, or a teacher or coach may penalize us if we miss a class, practice, or game because we choose to be involved in our church. This kind of response from some people can seem frustrating. But it is important to recall the hope that we have as Christians. By focusing on that hope, we will be able to see the blessings God has in store for us when we trust in him.

Lord of all hope, help me to stay focused on your ways, be a voice of your hope, and know that you will always be with me.

Only with Love

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a
clanging cymbal.

(1 Corinthians 13:1)

Imagine a singer on stage in front of thousands of fans. As she opens her mouth to sing her hit song, a noisy, meaningless gonging sound comes forth that makes the fans cover their ears. We are like that singer if we do not have love. If we try to do something good, like community service, just to get credit for it, and not out of love, our good deed is as meaningless as a noisy gong. Jesus Christ did everything out of love, and we are given his example to follow. Are you doing anything just because it might look good on a college or job application, or are you acting out of love? Reflecting on these questions will keep us from being a noisy gong.

May all my actions be done in love, and may you hear my voice, not a noisy gong, echoing in your Kingdom. I pray to you, Lord of all love.

Turn to Christ in Suffering

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."

(Mark 5:34)

Suffering takes many forms. We can suffer physical pain and we can suffer spiritual pain. We are not alone in our suffering, even when it seems as if we are. Jesus feels our pain and knows when we reach out to him for healing. When we turn to him, even if we are timid about it, he is ready to help us. For suffering caused by such things as abuse, bullying, depression, and disease, we can turn to God as well as to experts or trusted adults. We must ask for help when we need it—from both God and the people God provides for us.

Christ the healer, I know you feel my pain; help me to heal and to find those who can help me as I need it.

Let's Not Lose Ourselves

What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?

(Luke 9:25)

When those students who “rule” the school walk down the hall, they seem to have gained the whole world. We may want to be as popular as they seem to be. Although being popular is not bad, if we act like someone other than ourselves just to be popular, we could be doing just what Jesus warned about: losing ourselves. As we navigate our way around school or other communities, we need to ask ourselves: Am I being true to who I am? Or am I acting in a way that forfeits what I value: my relationship with my family, church community, or God? If our actions are appropriate and aligned with our values and we still become popular, then we will know it is for the right reasons.

I know you understand my desire for popularity, so guide me, Lord, to be the person I am meant to be rather than letting me forfeit myself.

The Shepherd

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

(Psalm 23:1)

We often hear of God as the shepherd, but many of us do not know what a shepherd does. As we define this term, we learn why this image is popular. Shepherds did more than lead the sheep; they protected them from wolves and thieves, and they kept watch over them and guarded them. For people of biblical times, sheep and shepherds were a common sight. People saw how well shepherds cared for their sheep and realized that the comparison between God and a shepherd was a good one. Who in our time cares for others like a shepherd? And how might that person demonstrate characteristics that God has? Perhaps we could write our own psalm-like poem, describing God in a new way.

Good Shepherd, protect, care for, and guide me today and all the days of my life.

Anointed for God

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

(1 Samuel 16:13)

Sometimes someone sees something in us we do not see in ourselves. Maybe a teacher or coach points to us, through our peers, and says, "You!" This can be scary or exciting or both. We might not know why we're being chosen, but we know we are being called to do something out of the ordinary. God calls us in a similar way, and we may not know exactly what we're being called to do. In our Baptism and Confirmation, we are anointed with oil as David was, and, like him, we will learn what God is calling us to do. As we wait for this calling, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit will help us to see and respond to it at the right time.

Lord, help me to be ready to answer your call.

Consider the Poor

Happy are those who consider the poor;
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.

(Psalm 41:1)

“Considering” the poor does not seem too demanding until we look into the meaning of the word *consider*. The synonyms for *consider* include *think carefully about*, *pay attention to*, and *reflect on*. Thinking carefully about the poor means really looking at them, not just rushing by them. When we pay attention to them, the poor become more real to us, and we will be more likely to help them. Reflecting on the poor may cause us to be grateful for the things we have. As we walk in our cities or work in soup kitchens, it can be helpful to ask ourselves, What does this person, who seems to be poor, have to teach me? If we care for those who are poor and try to learn from them, we can be assured that the Lord will deliver us in our day of trouble.

Lord, help me to be more mindful of the poor. May I learn the lessons they can teach me.

All Things Are from Him

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

(John 1:3)

Because all things came into being through Christ, we know that the created world is a gift that we must preserve for future generations. Thanks to science, we know how our lifestyle impacts the earth and its inhabitants. We know that car exhaust can come back to the earth in the form of polluted rain; pesticides can seep into the ground and cause water to be undrinkable; throwing trash into storm drains pollutes the ocean and damages sea life. Yet with all that knowledge, many still continue to disregard the teaching that everything comes into being through Christ. Are you doing your part to protect God's gifts in nature?

All things came into being through you, O Christ; help me to honor and respect these things.

Who Am I?

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."

(Luke 9:20)

We don't often ask others to tell us who we are, but we do often look to others for approval of who we are. We may sometimes try to look like others, and we may sometimes try to act like others. But God wants us to be ourselves. Jesus asked others to tell him who they thought he was so they could share in the Good News of salvation. Jesus may ask us: Who do you say you are? How do you show others who you are? Are you being the person God wants you to be, or are you trying to be the person others want you to be? If we ask these questions about ourselves and answer honestly, we may be more able to become the person God calls us to be.

God, who wants me to be me, help me to know and accept myself more and more each day.

Loving Self

“. . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

(Matthew 22:39)

Many times we hear the command to “love your neighbor” but don’t hear the second part: “as yourself.” However, in order to love our neighbors, we have to love ourselves. Many of us have a hard time with this. Some of us might not be able to identify those things that are good about ourselves. But if we want to take the command of Jesus seriously, we need to work on the “as yourself” part of his command of love. As we look at ourselves physically, spiritually, and personally, we can ask: What do I do well? What things do people tell me I am good at? When I receive a compliment, do I listen and thank the person, or brush it off?

God, you love me no matter what I accomplish or how I look. Help me to love myself so that I may follow your command to love others.

One Body

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(1 Corinthians 12:27)

Just as the eye is part of something bigger, the body, we are part of something bigger too. Paul explains this concept to the Corinthians, and it has relevance for us today. An eye isn't any good if it is taken out of the body. In the same way, God does not intend us to exist apart from others. When we embrace others, we function well. As members of the Body of Christ, we must accept all of the other parts of the Body who help to make up this community. Because we are part of the Body of Christ, it is helpful for us to ask ourselves: Do I accept all others into this community of faith? Do I recognize the contribution others make to the Body of Christ?

Christ, my brother, help me to be a positive, accepting, healthy member of your Body.

Tough Times and True Friends

Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

(Philippians 1:25–26)

Paul wrote that he would remain loyal and true to his friends. We can show our loyalty to our friends in many ways. One way is when our friends go through tough times. If a friend is being bullied, we step in. When a friend is hurting, we try to help him or her or seek out someone who can. True friends don't abandon each other. A good way to make sure we're being true friends is to ask ourselves: Am I true to my friends when they really need me? Can they call me and count on me when times are tough?

Christ, who stays with us through everything, help me to be a true friend to others.

Choosing Support

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.

(Romans 16:17)

We grow up hearing about peer pressure. Most parents have asked something like, "If all the kids were jumping off the bridge, would you do the same?" They want us to resist blindly going along with the crowd. But peer pressure can be a good thing too. When we choose peers who lead us, or even pressure us, in positive ways, peer pressure can actually be healthy. So in addition to avoiding negative peer pressure, we can develop a group of peers who want us to achieve and who encourage us to make good decisions. And we can do the same for them. When we encounter negative peer pressure, it is easier to make the right choices if others back us up.

Loving God, as I move in and among my peers, help me to choose friends who want me to be my best, friends that I can support as well.

God's Children

He was the son . . . of Joseph . . . son of
Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

(Luke 3:23,38)

Genealogy is the study of one's family tree. The genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke shows his connection to all of humanity: he is a child of Adam and a child of God. We may know something about our own family tree. Some of us can trace our ancestors back to another country or to Native American communities. However, some of us may not have the ability to trace our lineage because of slavery, loss of records, or adoption. Regardless of our family tree, we are all connected to others before us, and we are all children of God. What do you know about your family tree, and how does this affect your identity? What does it mean to you to be a child of God? And how does your life demonstrate and celebrate this reality?

Jesus, Son of God, let me be more appreciative of my family tree, and let me proudly proclaim myself as a child of God.

Live by the Spirit

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.

(Galatians 5:16)

In this Scripture verse from Paul to the Galatians, Paul is offering particular guidelines on Christian living. He makes it very clear that one way to walk with Christ is to resist living by the desires of the flesh and having the “works of the flesh” dominate our lives. This does not mean that our body or our physical nature is bad. It simply means that our lives should be guided by the Spirit rather than by desires of the flesh. When our lives are ruled by the Spirit, we will experience such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When my desires might separate me from you, O God, keep me on your path.

Positive Posting

What is desirable in a person is loyalty,
and it is better to be poor than a liar.

(Proverbs 19:22)

Using social networking sites and texting friends can be entertaining. However, it can provide a tempting opportunity to display false information. It is much easier to lie using a keyboard than to lie in person. Some lying may seem harmless: touching up a photo before posting it or saying you did something fun when you were really sitting at home. In fact, lying is never harmless and can even be dangerous. If we make accusations that may not be true, there can be dire consequences. Once a lie starts to travel electronically, we cannot stop its progress. Before texting or posting, let's be sure we are sharing something positive, communicating with truth, and acting with others' permission before we share something about them. We never know who will see what we write.

Lord, help me to always be mindful of the consequences of my behavior, both online and in person.

Don't Worry

He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing."

(Luke 12:22–23)

Most of us have heard the song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," which was released in 1988 and is still being recorded by various artists. As we listen or sing along, we may recall the Gospel message in this Scripture verse that is found in Luke. Jesus reminds us that worrying doesn't gain us anything. We should, instead, be more like birds or flowers, who don't worry about anything and yet are provided with all they need. Letting go and trusting in God can be difficult for us because we like to be in control. However, we must constantly remind ourselves that we are in God's hands. Doing our part, taking proper action, and preparing adequately are all important things that we must do, but ultimately we must learn to let go to God.

Help me, dear Lord, to let go of useless worry. Guide me to do what I can do, but then to trust in you.