The Office of the Chaplain & Religious Life at SMU is excited to provide the 2023 Fall Ecumenical Devotional Guide to the SMU community. Christians across the world participate and grow in their spiritual lives in a variety of ways. Through prayer, communion, confession, music, art, nature, readings, and much more, we all explore ways of deepening our faith, and tuning ourselves towards God. Our office believes that the exploration of your spiritual life is vital not only to your faith but also to your education, personal growth, and overall well-being during your time at SMU. In light of this belief, we offer this Devotional Guide as a resource for the SMU community in order that it might be a reflective tool for your own exploration in your journey of faith.

The Christian tradition is both deep and wide. The word "ecumenical" refers to this collective body of Christian traditions throughout the world. To say something is "ecumenical" is to say that it strives after unity within areas of common ground amidst differences in thought and practice. Without ignoring these differences, to be "ecumenical" is simply to aim towards a collective expression of a shared faith. We hope that this guide will reflect this goal. The SMU features a diverse community of Christian traditions. In this guide, you will find devotionals written by students, staff, and faculty representing the variety of traditions found at SMU. Wherever you find yourself on your faith journey, we hope their words may not only guide you in prayer and reflection but also encourage and challenge you along the way.

As an ecumenical resource, this guide is a collaboration from across the university. No one viewpoint is meant to be representative of all Christians or all traditions. Instead, we hope it is a reflection of the wide story that God is telling amongst our communities. If you have questions or want to get connected with a specific community on campus, please reach out to chaplain@smu.edu.

USING THE GUIDE

This guide contains devotionals around our theme for the semester: Life in Common. This overall theme will explore the overlap between our faith and community. What does it mean to live in community as a person of faith? How are communities a blessing to us? How are they challenging? More so, what does it mean that we live in diverse communities with people of different backgrounds, traditions, and perspectives? We invite you to participate in exploring these questions with us as we consider what it means to live "Life in Common" with one another.

There are twelve entries in this guide, each featuring prayers, a reading from the Bible, a reflection, and a guided practice for you to explore. There is no prescribed way to use this guide. Use it daily and start the guide over afterwards. Meet weekly with a small group of friends and read along together. Or even simply take note of a few spiritual practices and try putting them into your normal routine. Ultimately, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in prayer and reflection, and allow this guide to be a simple tool along the way.

Grace and peace to all this year. Join us for Life in Common.
Reflection:
When I was in college, my university minister once told me that life in college was likely the closest that many of us would live a life similar to the description of the early church in Acts 2. Students in college share so much common space and experiences on a daily basis. Residence halls, stadiums, dining halls, libraries, quads, and classrooms are a few of the spaces that host frequent interaction among students during the semester. Students often share meals together, share notes in class, and share late nights studying, playing intramurals, or attending any one of the plethora of happenings on campus. For those engaged in their spiritual lives, this college rhythm often includes prayer, worship, and service with a community on-campus. Simply put, students share a life in common together.

The author of Acts shares a unique picture of the early church, one defined by spiritual formation, community, and worship. It is a depiction of a church united around shared meals, shared property, and shared worship: “All the believers were together and had everything in common.” Of course, this is not to say that each person in this community shared the same heritage or life experience. If you go back and read the first part of chapter 2, you will see that this gathered community was filled with people from different nations and life experiences. This diverse community shared a common faith which spilled out into this common life where they worshiped together, gathered over meals with one another, and shared all they had.

The global Christian community may seem far removed from this initial picture of the early church, but I believe that my university minister was right in his theory that life in college reflects the life of the early church—at least in part. We are often pulled away from one another whether through social media or our culture which demands that we are always doing more. What if we looked at our time in college through the lens of the early church? What if we took this unique opportunity to live, interact, and build community with those who were closest to us? I’d challenge you to consider the ways that you have set aside time and space to fully live life in common with those around you—to fellowship, break bread, and worship. More so, I’d challenge you to consider the things in your life that might be getting in the way of being present with those around you.

Opening Prayer
Holy God, we confess that we live scattered lives, drawn this way and that in an endless cycle of “to-do” lists and distractions. Help us to stop, pause, and rest. Help us to be present with you, with ourselves, and with our community. Give us clear eyes to see and ears to hear. Amen.

Reading: Acts 2:42-47
42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
While the community at SMU is not a church—nor should it be—I believe this story in Acts serves as an important reminder for us as we navigate our time here. It challenges us to consider our present season of life and the people that surround us. It challenges us to consider how we might live out a life in common.

Closing Prayer:
Holy Lord, we come before you as fragmented people. Our lives are divided into pieces and we are unsure if the pieces when added up make up a life. What we do here, with one part of our life, seems undone there, with another part of our life. Who am I, Lord, who prays to you in this prayer? Where are we, Lord, when we so pray to you? Augustine has taught us we are restless until we find our rest in you, but this does not feel like such divine "restlessness"—it just feels confusing. Holy Lord, make us one with ourselves and one another. Form the scattered bits of our lives, the fragments of desires, into lives capable of saying "From the beginning, you, dear God, were with me." Help us be capable of truthful memory and fervent hope so that our lives will reflect the purposefulness of your kingdom. So reflected, may our lives manifest for one another your holiness and the world may say, “They are God’s people. See how they love one another.” Amen.
- Stanley Hauerwas, “Fragmented People,” in Prayers Plainly Spoken

Devotional compiled and written by Kaleb Loomis
Assistant Chaplain, SMU

spiritual practice:
morning & evening prayer

As we see in the reading from this entry, the early church was defined by regular communal prayer and worship. While we often think of community worship in the context of Sunday mornings or similar weekly worship services, one of the oldest Christian disciplines features daily personal or communal prayer. Morning and Evening Prayer is a historic Christian practice that gathered people together for intentional prayer to begin and end their days. As we explore the rhythms of a life in common, consider embodying this practice in your own community. Gather with others to regularly pray. Need help getting started? Here are some great resources to consider:
- Common Prayer by Shane Claiborne, Enuma Okoro, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (commonprayer.net)
- The Anglican Book of Common Prayer (bcponline.org)
- Daily Readings and Liturgy of the Hours (usccb.org/prayer-and-worship)
Opening Prayer
Merciful God, we aren't always fully "in" when it comes to our faith. We get stuck going through the motions. We fail to live out the faith we claim as our own. We say we will, but then we don't. We know you call us to a faith truly rooted in a deep connection to you. Give us strength, O God. We thank you for your steadfast patience and mercy. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21:28-32
28 “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ 29 He answered, ‘I will not,’ but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.

Reflection:
This past school year, our family hosted a German exchange student. So, we had three 16-year-olds living under one roof for ten months. They were seven weeks apart in age—birthdays from the end of May to mid-July. So, it was like having triplets from three different gene pools. It was an experience.

As we were nearing the time at which our exchange student, Lasse, would have to go home, our son Noah said that selfishly, one of the things he was going to miss about having Lasse here was that he took the pressure off of him to help out around the house. In our family, household responsibilities aren't "chores." They aren't ritual, mindless obligations. They are a part of what it means to be in a community. When we do our part, it makes the part of others easier for them.

Lasse was always willing to help around the house, so Lasse gave Noah a reason not to do things around the house. If Noah didn't take out the trash, Lasse would. But now that Lasse is gone, Noah sees that the work still needs to be done. Even though he has often said, "No, I won't," he has recently mentioned—not in so many words—that he realizes how important his participation in the family ethos is. He has started being more willing to do things, even when he initially says he won't.

This parable reminds us that God isn't worried about our initial response to the work God calls us to. God is patient. The Holy Spirit will continue to show up and beckon us to a life full of love of God and love of neighbor. We must continually examine our hearts and intentions and continue growing as children of God.

I am grateful for God's abundant patience and that God's grace is never taken off the table for any of us. No matter how we initially respond to God's call in our lives, God's mercy and grace remain steadfast.
Closing Prayer:
May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really CAN make a difference in this world so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

- from Benedictine Benediction

_devotional compiled and written by Rev. Heather Gottas Moore
Assistant Director for Lifelong Learning, Perkins School of Theology

spiritual practice:
the little way

St. Therese of Lisieux had a specific approach to her spiritual life, what she referred to as “the little way.” Rather than focus on grandiose achievements or striving to make a significant change or impact, St. Therese sought to do the ordinary, simple tasks of life with extraordinary love. She saw the smallest of tasks as the greatest acts of love. Challenge yourself to incorporate “the Little Way” in your own life and community. Make a commitment to always picking up trash when you see it outside. Or carry around extra pens and paper in case someone in class forgets theirs. Regardless of what it is, choose a small task to be your act of love taken alongside God. Seek God in prayer each time you perform this “mundane” task.
Opening Prayer
For the opening prayer, spend at least one minute in silence, asking God to clear your mind and open your heart for how God might be present with you today.

Reading: Luke 5:17-19
17 One day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. 18 Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, 19 but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

Reflection:
Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had to advocate or intercede for another who could not advocate for themselves, whether for spiritual or for physical help? My friends and I had such an experience. This time it was for physical healing through intercession. A friend had surgery, and everything went well, she returned home to recover, but suddenly, she had to return to the hospital due to serious complications. It was around this time that she posted in our group chat “. . . pray for me . . . I’m not getting better”. Immediately, with quick succession, we responded to her with prayers and scriptures for her encouragement. While she communicated from the confines of her hospital bed, weak in spirit and in body, we on the outside were able to, metaphorically speaking, lift her up, through intercessory prayer, and place her before Jesus for healing and restoration, on more than one occasion. Thank God for prayer because it was through the care of the doctors and nurses and our prayers that she regained strength and returned home. Friends taking a sick friend to Jesus for healing still happens today through intercessory prayer. We believe then and still do that our prayers to Jesus brought about her healing and restoration.

Today, the opportunity to take a friend to Jesus for healing is still available through intercessory prayer. In the bible story there are four things that we may want to consider; being aware of the needs of others, without having to be asked or told, faith in believing that what you do, with good faith, will work for their benefit, determination to overcome any obstacle to bring about their well-being, and empathy, to do for others as we would have them do for us in our time of need.

Closing Prayer:
Dear Heavenly Father, today I pray for an awareness to see others in their need, deepen my faith in you that you do care about all my concerns and pains, grant me the determination in advocating for others so that I don’t grow weary, and fill me with empathy to stand with others in their life journey. Amen.

Devotional compiled and written by Carolyn Douglas
Perkins School of Theology
spiritual practice:
the practice of paying attention

In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on spiritual practices that we can incorporate into everyday life. In her chapter entitled, “The Practice of Paying Attention,” Taylor suggests the importance of practicing reverence for the world around you. Reverence is the recognition of something greater than self—something that is beyond your control and understanding. It is easy to view our lives as the center of the story. Yet, we are one line in the grand story God is shaping in the world. To practice paying attention, to practice reverence, is “as simple as looking twice at people and things you might just easily ignore.” This week, find a space to stop and sit for 20 minutes or so and simply notice what you see. Reflect on your surroundings. Pay attention to the people that pass you by. Recall that each of them is made by God, loved by God, and sustained by God. Offer a prayer for all that you notice and thank God that your story is being told amidst the story that God is telling.
Opening Prayer
We are a community of students. We sometimes pray for study habits, disciplines, and study methods. And we sometimes pray for the highest possible grade, perhaps for scoring 100 on a test by offering correct answers to every question, and receiving a letter grade of A. Furthermore, we know that we should pray for more than test scores. We know that we should pray for loving relations to God, and for loving relations to all. Hear our prayer, oh God.

Reading: Matthew 22:34-40
34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Reflection:
The book of Matthew reports that a lawyer asked Jesus a question, "to test him." This test was about knowledge of the law: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus answered the question correctly, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Because this was "the greatest and first commandment," we can say Jesus scored 100 on the test! "A" and Amen!

Then, going beyond 100 (beyond letter grade "A"), Jesus added, "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The second commandment was added, not for extra credit, but because it was unavoidably implied by the first commandment. Insofar as "God is great" means God is "that than which none greater can be conceived" (St. Anselm), God must be "the one all-inclusive whole of reality" (Schubert M. Ogden). And loving the divine whole of reality must include loving the parts of that whole, including ourselves, and our neighbors, near and far, and even including our enemies. Therefore Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). After going beyond the lawyer's test, by explicating the second commandment, Jesus concluded, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Closing Prayer:
Somewhat like Jesus, we pray to go beyond scoring well on an academic test. We pray that we will love God by loving all who are loved by God, including neighbors (human and nonhuman, local and global), self, and even those who persecute us/enemies. Hear our prayer, oh God.

Devotional compiled and written by Dr. Theodore Walker, Jr.
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The Daily Examen is a prayer practice credited to St. Ignatius of Loyola. In order to grow in awareness of how God was present in his life, St. Ignatius reflected at the end of the day on his experiences throughout the day using a five-step reflection. Each step is listed below. Try spending a week using this reflection before you go to bed and notice how you see God showing up throughout your daily life.

1. Consider where you saw God present in your day (and/or potentially where you perceived God to be absent).
2. Thank God for those instances of daily communion.
3. Examine your thoughts, feelings, and actions. How do they affect where you see God and where you do not.
4. Select one feature of your day—either a place you saw God or a reason you did not see God. Spend a few moments in prayer about this feature.
5. Finally, pray for the next day that you would see God wherever God is.
entry five

Opening Prayer
God, thank you so much for making me just the way I am. I know that you are with me in the good and the bad. May I accept the gifts that you have so graciously given me, and may I know I do not have to go through life alone. Amen.

Reading: Philippians 1:27-30
27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel 28 and in no way frightened by those opposing you. For them, this is evidence of their destruction but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. 29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well, 30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Reflection:
Living together in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel seems like a tall feat. To be united in one spirit seems like an even bigger task. In a world where we are taught that the definition of being strong is not requiring any help or doing it all on our own, this can be even harder. Add trauma-conditioned responses that we have used in the past as survival techniques and there is a lot of unlearning of coping mechanisms that just no longer serve us. Living in a community is one of the great gifts that Christ has given us. The thing about a gift is that we must accept it. We must learn that we are worthy of the love that is offered to us and that it isn't just a convenience or an available resource, it is a new way to not only survive but to thrive. And when I accept this love from the communities that I live in, I can share Christ's love and grace with those around me too. The more I do this the more trust I can build and the safer I can be in the community of Christ. Today, how am I allowing myself to receive love and how am I sharing that love with those I have the privilege of doing community with?

Closing Prayer:
All loving God, thank you for giving me the community where I can grow in your love and grace. May I learn to accept that love that occurs in such abundance and may I share that love with those I have the joy of doing community with this day and always. Amen.

Devotional compiled and written by Seth Botts.
Perkins School of Theology

spiritual practice:
comfort zones

Get out of your comfort zone and join a group! Whether it be the campus chess club, student government, or a small group at your church or campus ministry, join! It is going to be uncomfortable at first, but everyone went for their first time. Put yourself out there, it will pay off.
Opening Prayer

Lord, I come to you in a position of prayer, allowing myself to be open to your direction and open to a relationship with you – for it is our relationship with you from which all other relationships in our life are formed. Lord, allow me to embrace my vulnerabilities as a way to foster connection with my fellow members of the SMU community, the surrounding community, and ultimately the world at large. Please, Lord, aid me to step out of my comfort zone and allow me to build a faithful community of friends and mentors during this season of my life. In Your Name, I pray – Amen.

Reading 1: Psalm 133

1 How very good and pleasant it is
   when kindred live together in unity!
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
   running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
   running down over the collar of his robes.
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
   which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
   life forevermore.

Reading 2: Ephesians 4:1-6

1 I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: 4 there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Reflection:

College, for me, was not what I had expected. Before going to college, I assumed that being a college student would be the best four years of my life. I thought it would be like sleep-away summer camp for four years straight – fun, easy, and the best time of my life. However, once I got to college, I quickly realized that the outside world doesn’t stop just because you’re in college.

While I was in college, my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, and as an only child who was away from home for the first time, it was an incredibly isolating time. I felt very alone, and as someone who has never expressed their feelings well, I didn’t feel like I had the resources even to communicate my needs and struggles with those around me. However, I had a fantastic community of friends and professors around me who met me where I was and truly cared for me. The friends I had made in college and the professors I had cared for me as I cared for them.
I once heard someone say, "If you want to have a relationship with someone, you have to spend time with them." They were referring to spending time in The Word to fortify one’s relationship with God, but I think the same quote can be applied to all relationships.

All of this is to say that I want to encourage each of you to invest in the relationships you find yourself in during your college years – these people, both friends, and superiors, will come to serve paramount roles in your life at times when you least expect it.

**Closing Prayer:**
For the closing prayer, I invite you to pray the Lord’s Prayer:

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Our Father who is in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory, forever.  
Amen
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*Devotional compiled and written by Madelyn Watkins.*

*Perkins School of Theology*

**spiritual practice:**
sharing meals

The exercise for this week is one stouped with the intention of deepening the relationships around you. I want to invite you to share meals this week with people who you value and really listen to them. In other words, allow those around you to fully express themselves – it is a core desire of humanity to feel seen, loved, and heard. And as you do this for someone, they will do for you.
entry seven

Opening Prayer
Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth: You have made us in your image to know you and reflect your glory. You created all the peoples of the earth and we celebrate the reflection of your splendor that we see manifested in each culture across the globe. Thank you for giving us the joy of human community and friendship. Give us grace now to examine ourselves as we seek Your face. Amen.

Reading: Romans 15:5-7
5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Reflection:
As a Campus Minister working with international students, I have the privilege of getting to know hundreds of students who have moved across the world to make SMU their home. I could tell you countless stories of the brilliant students here on campus doing groundbreaking research and preparing to be future global leaders. I’m constantly amazed at their generous hospitality—for all the help and guidance I’ve provided them, I’ve received even more in return. Working with such a diverse group of students I’ve gotten to witness the beauty of unity in the midst of differences. This kind of unity is central to the storyline of the Bible. The end of the Biblical story is a renewed creation where people from all nations will live in perfect harmony with God and one another. Our differences are not obliterated, they are celebrated as they are redeemed by God. The longer I work in a diverse environment, the more I’m captivated by this vision—and also reminded of how difficult it is to realize. It is not easy to embrace those who are different from us. The more we come into contact with those of various backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences, the more we are challenged to investigate our own lives, beliefs, and assumptions. I have found this to be both demanding and incredibly rewarding. Welcoming those who are different from us is well worth the challenge.

In his reflections on the Biblical idea of humanity as the image of God, the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck writes, “The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members.”[1] We are invited to experience greater depths of God’s glory as we welcome others across cultural differences. We are called to pursue harmony and hospitality because God has welcomed and reconciled us through Christ. As you reflect on your own practice of community, consider how you might welcome others across lines of difference. Dream together of a united community that reflects the gracious and welcoming character of God.

[1] Herman Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2, Chapter 13 (pp. 577)
Closing Prayer:
Most gracious God, forgive us for our thoughts, words, and actions that create chaos and division. We have all fallen short of your call to love our neighbor and to love you with our whole being. Thank you for your mercies which are new every morning and enable us to pursue harmony. Thank you for your loving welcome. Grant us the grace to welcome one another so that we may with one voice glorify You. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Devotional compiled and written by Fee Kennedy
RUF-I Campus Minister

spiritual practice:
otherness meditation

In his book, Soulful Spirituality, Dr. David Benner explores the practice of encountering “otherness” in the people. He suggests that others being different from us is important because it provides both a threat and a curiosity. It is threat because someone being different means our way of seeing the world is not the only way. More so, it challenges us to understand that our understandings of God might also be different. This “otherness” is also a curiosity because the presence of difference allows us the opportunity to grow. We can let go of our self-absorption and learn from one another.

Often, we fail to recognize the uniqueness and otherness of the people closest in our lives. While we often share much in common with these people, acknowledging the otherness in those cherished people present the opportunity to gain a new appreciation for them and to learn from them.

Take a moment to consider someone you are especially close with (i.e. a family member, a friend, a partner, etc.). Reflect on the following questions. Feel free to take notes on your phone or using a pen or paper.

- How do they see the world differently from you?
- How do they act in the world differently from you?
- What are the dreams and passions unique to them?
- What are the differences that cause friction between you both?

As you reflect and take notes, pray over these differences and reflect on the following:

- Which differences encourage you to grow?
- Which difference do you appreciate the most in the other person?
- How do the differences in this person help you understand or know God better?

Finally, spend a moment thanking God for this person and for all the ways that you are similar and different. Perhaps think of a way you can express how you appreciate their otherness in the next few weeks.
Reflection:
In this scene in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus’ disciples are portrayed as chastising a person for casting out unclean spirits/demons in Jesus’ name because he is not a follower of Jesus. In the ancient world, using a name of one with power was believed to give you power. Mark seems to present the disciples as viewing the exorcist’s use of Jesus’s name to gain power as an act of illegitimate usurpation given that he was not part of their in-group.

Jesus, however, views the man differently. “Whoever is not against us is for us,” he says.

We would be wise to attend to Jesus’ words today. We are a stridently divided world, and that division bleeds onto our campus. Were it the case that we Christians were above such division! But we have divided the Church into denominations, and then divided those denominations into other denominations. We disagree about theology, ethics, modes of worship, politics, and so on and so forth *ad nauseum*. Even though those with whom we disagree evoke the same name of Christ we do, we view them as “other,” sometimes even to the point of considering them illegitimate as “Christian.”

However, we can change those views. We can come to see anyone who sincerely acts in the name of Jesus, even if they act out their faith differently than we, as siblings in Christ. To do so is not to diminish the differences between us. Some are important, even defining. But those differences cannot, should not, destroy the unity of Christ that is in us all. Jesus’ instruction to the disciples that they should not clash with the non-disciple exorcist is not a burden, but a gift. We do not have to restrict our love only to those like us, only to those we like. Christ frees us from allowing differences to block the possibility of significant relationships.

Closing Prayer:
Christ, you gift us the possibility of praying for and, indeed, loving those in the faith who disagree with us about that very faith. Thank you for this blessing. Help me embrace and embody this blessing in the fullest of ways.

*Devotional compiled and written by Dr. Wes Allen
Lois Craddock Perkins Professor of Homiletics,
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spiritual practice:  
prayer & hate

A man once told his pastor that he hated someone in the church because he saw the person as damaging to the church given their radically different view of God and the world than he had. The pastor told the person to pray for the one (not “about” the one) they hated for two weeks and then come back to see her. When he came back, he told the pastor he still disagreed with the person but no longer felt hate. He asked the pastor why. She said, “It is impossible to truly hate someone and truly pray for them at the same time.” Find time today to pray for (not about) someone with whom you deeply disagree, perhaps even to the point of strident hated.
Opening Prayer
From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ “Prayer for Community”

“Embracing Father,
You grace each of us with equal measure in your love.
Let us learn to love our neighbors more deeply,
so that we can create
peaceful and just communities.
Inspire us to use our creative energies
to build the structures we need
to overcome the obstacles
of intolerance and indifference.
May Jesus provide us the example needed
and send the Spirit to warm our hearts for the journey.
Amen.”

Reading: Luke 19:11-26
11 As they were listening to this, he went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem
and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. 12 So he
said, “A nobleman went to a distant region to receive royal power for himself and then return.
13 He summoned ten of his slaves and gave them ten pounds and said to them, ‘Do business
with these until I come back.’ 14 But the citizens of his country hated him and sent a
delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to rule over us.’ 15 When he returned,
having received royal power, he ordered these slaves to whom he had given the money to be
summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by doing business. 16 The first
came forward and said, ‘Lord, your pound has made ten more pounds.’ 17 He said to him,
‘Well done, good slave! Because you have been trustworthy in a very small thing, take charge
of ten cities.’ 18 Then the second came, saying, ‘Lord, your pound has made five pounds.’ 19
He said to him, ‘And you, rule over five cities.’ 20 Then the other came, saying, ‘Lord, here is
your pound. I wrapped it up in a piece of cloth, 21 for I was afraid of you, because you are a
harsh man; you take what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow.’ 22 He said to
him, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked slave! You knew, did you, that I was a
harsh man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why, then, did
you not put my money into the bank? Then when I returned, I could have collected it with
interest.’ 24 He said to the bystanders, ‘Take the pound from him and give it to the one who
has ten pounds.’ 25 (And they said to him, ‘Lord, he has ten pounds!’) 26 ‘I tell you, to all
those who have, more will be given, but from those who have nothing, even what they have
will be taken away.

Reflection:
Drawing upon the wisdom of those who had come before him—and simply reflecting upon the
nature of human beings as human—St. Thomas Aquinas identified living in society as one of
the basic precepts of the natural law (see Summa Theologica, I-II, q.94, a.2). In so doing,
Aquinas recognized that God’s will for human beings is that we live in community—to live
isolated, individualistic existences ultimately is as harmful to human fulfillment as not eating or
drinking.
Human beings need to live in society. Society is not for us an extraneous addition but a requirement of our nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service, and dialogue with our brethren, human beings develop their potential; we thus respond to our vocation (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1879).

While we might think isolating ourselves on social media, in our rooms, and in video games will give us rest and happiness, the truth is that we need to be with others—to share our gifts with them, to let them share their gifts with us, and to learn from each other—if we want to be happy, fulfilled beings.

Jesus’ Parable of the 10 Gold Coins is a reminder that we need to use God’s gifts well. Life in society—being men and women who live our lives in communion with others—is a treasure God has given us, and to neglect that treasure is both to neglect a gift from God and to contradict human nature.

With that in mind, let us pray for the Holy Spirit to show us where we are neglecting the gift of our need to live in society! Let us ask God to help us see where we are not using this treasure well, so that we can become happier, healthier, and more fully human beings.

**Closing Prayer:**
A Prayer for Guidance written by Pope St. John Paul II:

“O God, You are our Creator.
You are good and Your mercy knows no bounds.
To You arises the praise of every creature.
O God, You have given us an inner law by which we must live.
To do Your will is our task.
To follow Your ways is to know peace of heart.
To You we offer our homage.
Guide us on all the paths we travel upon this earth.
Free us from all the evil tendencies which lead our hearts away from Your will.
Never allow us to stray from You.
O God, judge of all humankind, help us to be included among Your chosen ones on the last day.
O God, Author of peace and justice, give us true joy and authentic love, and a lasting solidarity among peoples.
Give us Your everlasting gifts. Amen!
May the God of mercy, the God of love, the God of peace bless each of you and all the members of your families!”

*Devotional compiled and written by Father Wade Bass
Catholic Campus Ministry at SMU*
Pray about people in your life—parents, grandparents, friends from college and high school—who do not receive much from us in terms of outreach and conversation. Ask God to bless them and to help you see them as He sees them. Then, pick up the phone and call one of them up! See if they’d be open to getting together for coffee, ask them how they are doing, and check in with them. In so doing, you will be meeting each other’s natural need for society—and responding to the gift that God has given you!
entry ten

Opening Prayer
Creator of Lights, who destined us for fellowship, who created us for community, be present in this time, even as you promise, and even as you are. Illuminate heart, mind, body, and soul. Amen.

Reading: Mark 5:1-20
They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. 3 He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, 4 for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. 6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, 7 and he shouted at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” 8 For he had said to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” 9 Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” 10 He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. 11 Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding, 12 and the unclean spirits begged him, “Send us into the swine; let us enter them.” 13 So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

14 The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened. 16 Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it. 17 Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighborhood. 18 As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. 19 But Jesus refused and said to him, “Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you.” 20 And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Reflection:
The story of the Gerasene Demoniac is powerful, enigmatic, and intriguing. It poses all kinds of questions for us as contemporary readers as we try to imagine the setting, the man, and his situation. One aspect of this story is especially salient—the man is entirely alone. Because he presents as a threat to society, he is pushed to the utmost margins and banished to solitude among the tombs of a local graveyard. It is a dramatic portrait of social isolation, a marginalizing so powerful it arguably signals a kind of social death.
To be in such a position is a tragedy indeed. Cut-off. Forced to the wayside. Feared or perhaps forgotten. Invisible.

Alone.

A simple word, carrying so much weight.

The work of Jesus in this story, the work of salvation in the narrative, isn’t limited to the elimination of the demonic force. Rather, it is the restoration of this man to his land, his people, and his family.

Salvation in community.

The abolishing of banishment.

Christian tradition asserts that God exists in the context of internal fellowship, an eternal movement expressed in the interaction between Divine Parent, Child, and Spirit. The perichoresis of the Triune God. And we, as creatures, are made in the image of this persisting dance.

We were created for one another. And we are called to bring those driven to the margins back in. To be on the look out for those society deems unlovable, unworthy, undesirable, useless, and help them find their way back into community. So that, at the end of the day, no one is left sitting in the darkness, among the tombs, invisible, alone.

Closing Prayer:
Triune God, persisting in Eternal Fellowship, grant us eyes to see those in need of fellowship and give us hearts willing to engage, so that no one finds themselves left behind, forgotten, and alone.

Devotional compiled and written by Jon-Michael Carman, Ph.D.
Religious Life Program Coordinator, SMU

spiritual practice:
connecting the disconnected

As a part of your prayer practice, set aside 3-5 minutes of silent reflection to consider just one question: “Who is there in my life that seems disconnected and alone?” It may not be obvious at first and, if not, don’t worry. Rather, maintain this as a distinct practice until you find someone that is in need of fellowship. Once you have this person in mind, see if there are practical ways you can bring them into fellowship with you or a friend group. This can be in the form of conversation, activities, meals, etc.
Opening Prayer
O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-10
1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and 5 like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

7 This honor, then, is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,” 8 and “A stone that makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Reflection:
St. Augustine’s most important book, The City of God, was an extended reflection on the idea of being a people. What takes a lot of individuals and turns them into a people? It isn’t, he says, their markers of identification. They can be different colors or speak different languages, be rich or poor, young or old, male or female. After he considers the different ways that philosophers have answered this, Augustine offers his own definition: a people are those who are bound together by what he calls the common objects of their love. If you want to know what makes up a people, he says, it’s simple: look at what they love. Augustine tells us that humans have one of two deepest loves: the complete love of God to the contempt of the self, or the complete love of self to the contempt of God. The same idea animates Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s famous quote that, “the line separating good and evil passes not through
states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either - but right through every human heart - and through all human hearts.” It is what we love in the deepest recesses of our hearts that makes us who we are.

Our society values what it calls authenticity—just being who you really are at the deepest recesses of yourself. But the Christian tradition is more suspicious of that kind of trust in ourselves. It seems that on our own, we are fragile and bent toward sin and death. In this bent state what we need is not simply to be more of our fragile and dying selves, but mercy that frees us from fragility and death. We need to be drawn out of ourselves and toward God. We don’t need only ourselves; we need others who draw us up and out of ourselves toward God. Once you were not a people, 1 Peter tells us—you were stuck inside yourself—but now you are a people. This is the deep hope for Christian community—to be drawn out of ourselves and toward the object of our common love.

But one of the great mysteries of faith is that what makes us a people isn’t finally that God is the common object of our love. It is that we are, together, in all our murkiness, the common objects of God’s love. This is the great gift of mercy. “Once you had not received mercy”—you were stuck alone inside yourself—“but now you have received mercy.” It is by virtue of being made a people whose common object of love is God that we become the objects of God’s uncommon mercy.

Closing Prayer
A Song to the Lamb  Dignus es
Revelation 4:11, 5:9-10, 13
Splendor and honor and kingly power *
   are yours by right, O Lord our God,
For you created everything that is, *
   and by your will they were created and have their being;
And yours by right, O Lamb that was slain, *
   for with your blood you have redeemed for God,
From every family, language, people, and nation, *
   a kingdom of priests to serve our God.
And so, to him who sits upon the throne, *
   and to Christ the Lamb,
Be worship and praise, dominion and splendor, *
   for ever and for evermore.
spiritual practice: centering prayer

There is an ancient form of Christian meditation called, “Centering Prayer.” During this exercise, practitioners typically spend several minutes in intentional meditative prayer focusing on a verse, a word that describes the character of God, or even simply their own breathing. The goal of the exercise is simply “to be.” In the midst of our hectic pace of life, centering prayer offers a moment to pause and open our hearts and minds to God.

As we have been exploring the theme of “Life in Common,” take a moment to practice centering prayer with a particular focus on community. Find a quiet spot to sit with your back straight to ease your breathing. Relax your body and sit in such a way that nothing will hurt, go numb, or be otherwise uncomfortable. Then focus on a word or phrase the represents “community” to you, or more specifically something that represents Christian community to you. Simply sit in silence for a few minutes focusing on your word or phrase. It may help to follow the rhythm of your breathing. As you breathe in, say your word phrase. As you breathe out, express gratitude such as “Thanks be to God.”

As you try this form of prayer, you mind will wander. That’s okay! Let the thought wash over you and return to your practice. Set a timer on your phone or simply finish when you are ready. At the end, offer one final prayer of gratitude for those you see as your community.
Opening Prayer
Living Christ, you call us into community with you and one another. Grant that we would live out our faith in love for you and one another. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 4:18-22
18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishers. 19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Reflection:
“The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”

John Wesley

Christian faith is deeply personal AND lived out in community. In today’s reading, we see the centrality of community in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus begins his earthly ministry by calling together an intimate group of friends who literally walk alongside him to his death.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus attracts and draws great crowds of people eager to hear him teach, begging for healing and in need of nourishment, physically and spiritually. At times, Jesus intentionally withdraws from the crowd for solitude and time alone with God. Typically, this time alone is interrupted by the crowds tracking him down. Always, the Twelve, the disciples are nearby – Jesus’ closest friends offering support, running interference when the crowds seem too demanding, and asking questions that draw out Jesus’ purpose.

Like Jesus, we need a small group of intimate friends who walk alongside us in the joys and the challenges of daily life. Vivek Murthy, US Surgeon General, issued a May 2023 Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. The report titled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, highlights the negative health impacts of loneliness and the health benefits of social connection, and community! He explores the complex and complicated benefits and dangers of social media platforms that allow us to “connect” virtually and encourage us to connect in real life.

This is the essence of the Gospel – God came to live among us in the real life person of Jesus! Jesus walked among us and called others into a community of faith. At SMU, we live in a crowded, busy, socially active, and academically demanding community. Who in this amazing community is your small circle of trusted friends? Who, like the disciples, can ask you hard (sometimes ridiculous) questions that call you to live into your God-given potential? Who will you take with you to “the Garden of Gethsemane” to watch while you pray – even if they fall asleep? Who will help you find food for 5,000 people longing for community and nourishment that feeds the body and the spirit? Likewise, for whom will you be a trusted friend – living out your faith in love for others?
Closing Prayer
Living Christ, you call us into community with you and one another. Grant that we would live out our faith in love for you and one another. Amen.

Devotional compiled and written by Rev. Lisa Garvin.
Chaplain & Minister to the University, SMU

spiritual practice:
walking with friends

Invite two friends to go for a walk (on campus or in one of Dallas’ beautiful parks) to share the joys and challenges of this week with one another.
prayer for community

As we close these reflections on community, we leave you with a guided prayer practice. Use this prayer in a group setting or simply on your own. Repeat the prayer or any part of it as many times as you’d like.

**Opening Invocation**
God of community, you remind us that we are made to be with one another. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You call us into divine community with you and with one another. Help us live out this calling of community and thus become a reflection of your love.

**Matthew 18:20**
20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

**Confession**
Lord, we confess that we take our blessings of community for granted... Forgive us our sin.
We have divided ourselves in groups and reject those who are different... Forgive us our sin.
We have mistaken our finite communities for your Infinite love... Forgive us our sin.
We have refused to love our neighbor as ourselves... Forgive us our sin.
We have lived in ways less than loving... Forgive us our sin.
We have settled for something less than whole... Forgive us our sin.
Forgive us, Lord, for we have sinned.

**Assurance**
God’s heart has been made known in Christ Jesus and through that name and in Christ’s live, We are forgiven and we are being made whole. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Prayers for a College Campus**
Pause after each petition in prayer over those in your community who come to mind.

God of all comfort, hear our prayers:
For those today whose lives have become too full and for those who need places of involvement.
For those who lack the discipline to study and those who lack permission to play.
For those whose faith is shaking and for those whose faith needs to be shaken.
For those who are sick, who are grieving, who are wounded, who are worried and for those who will walk beside them.
For those who need inspiration and for those who need to be inspiring.
For the health of our community and for the wholeness of all your children in it.
For all these we pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen

**Closing Prayer**
Holy God, remind us the truth of Jesus’s words: Where two or more are gathered in your name, you are there. In the ways we love one another, in the ways we challenge one another, and in the ways we live with one another, help us to reflect your love in community. Amen.
Thank you for journeying along with us through these reflections and practices on community. While we could fill many more pages on the purpose and practice of Christian community, we hope these entries have helped guide deeper thinking, prayer, and action for you. We invite you to continue to use this guide in the future. We hope God blesses you and your community as we learn to live out the commands to love God and love one another.

This guide could not have been completed without the hard work of all who contributed to it. We are grateful for those who wrote a devotional and those who helped in crafting and reviewing this guide. We look forward to the ways in the future that the Christian community at SMU will offer shared expressions of our collective faith.

connect with us

Need to have a confidential conversation? Or simply interested in connecting with the Office of the Chaplain & Religious Life? See the contact information below to learn about all the ways you can get involved or receive support on campus.

General Email: chaplain@smu.edu
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interested in contributing for future devotional guides? email kloomis@smu.edu to find out how!