**Week #4: Felt Need**

We often feel stuck and discouraged. We wonder if God is done with us, if our prayers matter, if the best years were in the past.

**Key Idea**

Prayer activates our creative response to God’s grace, compels us to love those we disagree with, orients our whole life toward God, teaches us to rely on God in all things, weaves us together as the body of Christ, and is made visible through our actions of serving God and neighbor.

**Key Verse**

“16 Rejoice always. 17 Pray continually. 18 Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (CEB)

**Suggested Scripture for Worship**


**Supporting Readings**

Chapter 4 of A Plain Account of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection Theologically Considered by Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki pp.135-144.

Section VIII of A Plain Account of Christian Perfection by John Wesley pp. 81-90.
Sermon Helps

ILLUSTRATION: DISCOURAGEMENT HAPPENS

Have you had one of those times when you’re really into something—working on a project, learning to knit, writing a novel, finishing the basement, enjoying a new hobby (add your thing), and you’re excited and giving it your all and then you suddenly hit a wall. Suddenly it’s not so much fun. Suddenly it seems like work. You’re stuck, bored, in avoidance mode. All the creative energy you were feeling is gone.

You put your project up, disappointed and discouraged, wishing you could move back into the energy and passion of the project, wondering if it will ever come back.

Discouragement happens in relationships, work, in our worldview, and even in our faith.

We look at the world around us and see the politics, injustice, depression, anxiety, addiction, toxicity, and we wonder if we have all gotten stuck.

We wonder where the Spirit has gone, if God hears our prayers, if the best is in the past?

Have you ever felt this way? Maybe you feel this way today?

If so, you’re not alone.

CONNECTION TO SCRIPTURE: LUKE 18:1-8

Jesus realized that we deal with discouragement in our lives and in our faith. Perhaps the disciples asked, or maybe Jesus just realized that they had been doing some hard things with erratic results and they were getting discouraged by the never-ending crowds, the continual requests, not knowing how their prayers would be answered.

Jesus responds by telling them this parable about the need to “pray always and not lose heart,” describing this widow who had such great persistence. (Luke 18:1). As he does so, he encourages us to have this same kind of persistent faith.

The story is about an unjust judge who does not respect God or anyone else. He is only in it for himself. The widow though, respects God and others and keeps returning to ask the judge to grant her justice.

The judge finally gives in, not because he grows in respect of God or others, but because she is so annoyingly persistent.

This story reminds us of why we shouldn’t give up on God and faith too quickly...and God’s sense of humor. One way or another the judge does what he is supposed to. Not even God could compel the judge to do the right thing, but the persistence of the woman does. Persistence is the secret weapon of the faithful who keep insisting on and working for God’s ways in this world. Consider every great project, every great cause, every great act of faith. None of them came about without great persistence, especially through the routine, difficult, and discouraging times.
Jesus reminds us that we can be confident that God is working in all things to draw them to God’s good end. Sometimes they happen easily because God attuned people hear and respond. And sometimes they happen with more creative measures like an old widow nagging an unjust judge until he gives in to her request. Sometimes there are great and miraculous moments. But more often it happens when we just put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into it: when we push through and practice that part over and over, when we write and rewrite a passage, when we go to the counselor, when we forgive, when we keep praying. Either way, we can be encouraged and take heart, for God is working for good.

**CONNECTION TO THE WESLEY READINGS**

Prayer is a tool that allows us to persist in our faith in ways that lead to transformation. When we persist in praying faithfully, opening ourselves to God’s direction each day, the Holy Spirit enters in and works in creative ways so that what is accomplished is greater than we would have imagined on our own. It welcome’s a God sized response.

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki puts it this way: prayer activates our creative response to God’s grace, “God calls; we respond. Prayer is response to the ever-present calling grace of God” (137).

John Wesley talks about it in this way, “God does nothing but in answer to prayer. Even the people who have been converted to God without praying for themselves (which is extremely rare) were prayed for by others. Every new victory that a soul gains is the effect of a new prayer” (83).

Persistent prayer brings us to a new place of grace for ourselves and others and in that new place we experience a conversion. Through persistent prayer, we are transformed in love. This perfect love from God opens new possibilities in us and energizes us for the work of transforming the world.

Suchocki writes, “[Prayer] is the way of God’s working in the whole universe. Prayer is an opening to the grace of God so that things happen in the world that could not happen apart from prayer. God works through our responsiveness, our intentional opening of ourselves to the work of God so that we can be used of God in God’s work in the world…We do not know what hedges might affect the outcome of our prayers. All we know is that prayer is going to make a difference” (138).

**APPLICATION: WAYS OF PRAYING**

We often fall into praying in a routine way for the same sorts of routine things. The most common form of prayer is of intercession. Too often this becomes our only way of praying and is overly focused on healing, safety, and blessing for family and country.

But as persistent prayer converts us and fills us with grace, we realize that we are invited to pray individually and communally for God to break through and to do great things in our midst, and to forgive and be forgiven, asking that even our enemies would experience grace as the world around us is transformed as God’s Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven.”
The widow in the parable reminds us to be persistent in our prayers for justice. Luke reminds us to pray that we would not lose heart but would keep faith over the long run.

What would happen if you prayed this kind of prayer individually, but then the community also came together and agreed to pray the same prayer for justice or peace to break through during the week and in worship? Surely this will open the door for God’s creative Spirit to respond to us and to move in ways that might not happen otherwise. John Wesley suggests that this kind of prayer activates our creative response to God’s grace, compels us to love those we disagree with, orients our whole life toward God, teaches us to rely on God in all things, weaves us together as the body of Christ, and is made visible through our actions of serving God and neighbor.

PERSONAL CONNECTION: I THESSALONIANS 5:12-18

As we pray individually and together, asking God to transform and save, to convict and to work for good, our whole life becomes a way of praying as we open ourselves to God’s perfect love. We become more and more able to follow the directions of the writer to the Thessalonians who urges us not to “repay evil with evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”