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

Luke 18:1-8, Philippians 4:4-20, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

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.

Calls to Worship

WELCOME/SPOKEN WORD INTRODUCTION

Welcome to worship on this final week of our series, A Perfect Love. We’ve spent the last weeks of worship and small group immersed in Scripture through the lens of John Wesley’s A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, considering – even being challenged – to let God’s grace grow in us a perfect, complete love.

And, as Wesley approaches the end of his writing, he begins to include some beautiful teachings on prayer. Oh, these aren’t an afterthought, as Wesley has been clear that praying without ceasing is a part of Christian perfection. John Wesley was a man of prayer, and one learns a thing or two through a lifetime of praying.

Have you ever felt stuck or discouraged? Wondered if God is done with you, if your prayers even matter, if the best years were in the past? Then you are in the right place today as we learn from our forefather’s experience that it might enter our own and render us perfectly unstuck.
Let us turn our hearts and minds to worship the One who is source and recipient of all prayer, the One who is perfect love and loves perfectly.

(adapted from A Perfect Love, p. 135)

CALL TO WORSHIP #1 (RESPONSIVE)

Leader: Sing praises to God, O you saints, and give thanks to God’s holy name!

People: We exalt you, O God, for you have restored us to life!

Leader: We may cry through the night, but your joy comes in the morning.

People: You hear us, O God, and you are gracious in our distress.

Leader: You turn our mourning into dancing!

People: Our souls cannot be silent! O God, our Savior, we give thanks to you for ever! (UM Book of Worship #453)

Prayers, Litanies, etc.

OPENING PRAYER

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles.

Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing;

let there be moments when your presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk.

Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed.

And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder:

How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!

“Blessed is the Eternal One, the holy God!” Amen. (Worship & Song, #57)

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hidden.

Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen. (UM Hymnal, p. 6)
PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Renewing God, trusting in your infinite grace,
  we confess that we need your healing and forgiveness.
For all that is broken in our minds and bodies,
  we ask your healing.
For all that is amiss in our choices and our relationships,
  we ask your forgiveness.
For all that works against life and blessing
  in our hearts, and in the world,
  we open ourselves to your transforming grace.
Heal us, forgive us, and make us new. Amen. (Worship & Song #93)

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Almighty God, giver of every good and perfect gift,
  teach us to render to you all that we have and all that we are,
  that we may praise you, not with our lips only,
  but with our whole lives,
  turning the duties, the sorrows, and the joys of all our days
  into a living sacrifice to you;
through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (UM Book of Worship #555)

A PRAYER OF SUSANNA WESLEY

You, O Lord, have called us to watch and pray.
Therefore, whatever may be the sin against which we pray,
  make us careful to watch against it,
  and so have reason to expect that our prayers will be answered.
In order to perform this duty aright,
  grant us grace to preserve a sober, equal temper,
  and sincerity to pray for your assistance. Amen. (UM Book of Worship #528)

SENDING FORTH/BENEDICTION

May God’s perfect love uplift you.
May God’s perfect love transform you.
May God’s perfect love surround you through the challenges ahead.
May God’s perfect love convince you, in every situation, to love.
Go now to love others, even as Christ loves you. (Worship & Song #176 adapted)
Artistic Elements

HYMNS (UM HYMNAL)

Note: hymn numbers followed by “(W)” are written by Charles Wesley

384 (W) – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
420 – Breathe on Me, Breath of God
422 (W) – Jesus, Thine All Victorious Love
453 – More Love to Thee O Christ
492 – Prayer is the Soul’s Sincere Desire
513 (W) – Soldiers of Christ, Arise