AWAKENED TO GRACE

THE ALTOGETHER CHRISTIAN DEVOTIONAL 2026

Ordinary Practices that Open Us to Extraordinary Grace

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to Extraordinary Grace

The Altogether Christian Devotional 2026

The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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FOREWORD

Bishop Tom Berlin

We want to actually live the Christian life, rather than simply talk about it. Our goal is to become disciples of Jesus Christ, people whose lives reflect the love of God in the words we say as well and the things we do. We want to unite faith to action, and live in such a way that we develop loving relationships, help people in our communities, unite rather than divide our country, and honor Jesus as we follow his commandments and use our gifts to share the good news of his love with others. Awakened to Grace devotional materials are based on the assurance of the Apostle Paul, who told the Ephesians,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8–9 NRSVUE)

Here you will find devotional resources that will root you in scripture and help you consider the ways God wants to use your life to bless others. Awakened to Grace will enable you to develop weekly spiritual practices that will enable your life of prayer and devotion to God. Our hope is that you will encounter the Holy Spirit as you read the Bible, engage in refection with the devotional writing, and enjoy times of silent contemplation.

When we create the space to encounter the Holy Spirit, we find that God will offer us hope in times of despair, direction in times of confusion, forgiveness in times of remorse, and reminders of love when we feel distant from the Lord or people important to us. The key to being awakened to God's grace is to take time to participate in practices of prayer, reading the scripture, silence, and other spiritual disciplines so that we continue in the flow of God's grace and direction. Sunday worship is essential to our life in Christ. These resources allow you to continue to enjoy the presence of God in an intentional way throughout the week.

The early Methodist movement was vital. Lives were transformed as they became devoted to the way of Christ. People recovered from addiction to alcohol. They learned to work and save money to care for their families. They shared their faith with such integrity that their friends and neighbors entered the Christian life for the first time. They fed the hungry, visited prisoners, taught the illiterate to read, and organized against the institution of slavery in Britain. That was the fruit of their faith. The roots of their faith were their spiritual practices. They took time daily to be awakened to God's grace, which was new every morning in their lives. God guided them, which is why they gained an authentic faith with observable fruits that they shared with others.

Make a commitment to use these resources to be awakened to grace. Take time to step into the flow of God's love throughout the week and see what God can do in your life.

How to Use This Daily Guide

Each week centers on a theme that ties to the overall seasonal series. They are written by a wide variety of authors in Florida: clergy and laity, pastors of all orders, seminary students, and a diversity of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ministry contexts, and geographic location. Each author will follow this weekly progression:

Sunday: An introduction to the week's theme, with a preview of the texts and reflections ahead.

Monday: *"Seed."* A reflection on the theme from the most general, accessible perspective, particularly for "seeking" people who are newer to the faith.

Tuesday: *"Roots."* Common obstacles that prevent most people from growing in this area of their faith, including encouragement for you to push your roots deeper and trust in God.

Wednesday: *"Breakthrough."* A pivotal insight, surprise twist, or novel experience that will help you grow in your faith.

Thursday: *"Becoming."* Guidance for cultivating this aspect of your faith over the long haul of your spiritual journey.

Friday: *"Fruitfulness."* The impact you can make in the world and the lives of others once this aspect of faith bears full fruitfulness in your life.

Saturday: *"Connections."* This day is written by a representative of a Conference team or initiative, connecting you with the work and witness of United Methodists across the state. It may include upcoming events, ways to volunteer, and things to pray for.

Daily Prayers of Intercession are adapted from the *Irish Book of Common Prayer* (United Kingdom: Canterbury Press, 2018).

The Altogether Christian

Rev. Dr. Brett Opalinski
Candler School of Theology

John Wesley's notion of the "altogether Christian" contrasts with the "almost Christian." For Wesley, the "almost Christian" was one who had all the outward forms of faith: worship, prayer, service, Sunday School, church committees, etc., but was missing one key element, a heart seeking transformation. They practiced much of the Christian life and had "almost" arrived at what Jesus most wanted for his followers.

The "altogether Christian," on the other hand, was one who practiced all the things mentioned above, but their higher goal was transformation of heart and life. The "altogether Christian" is one who seeks more than anything else to grow in love towards God and people. Their heart is slowly transformed into the heart of Christ, and they gradually learn to love as God loves. Their life, then, is lived from this place of love.

Over the next few weeks, our times of prayer will focus on becoming "altogether Christians," those who are seeking to grow in the love of God and neighbor more than anything else. Our prayer will be for God to make our hearts more like the heart of Christ.

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Week of September 6, 2026

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish
Retired Elder, The Florida Conference

Sunday, September 6

Unless otherwise designated, all prayers are from hymns by Charles Wesley and are drawn from *The Quest for Love Divine* by Paul Chilcote.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

A Matter of the Heart

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish

Monday, September 7

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day:
O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free,
A heart that always feels Thy blood
So freely shed for me.

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 36:26 (NRSV)
A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

Reflection: Ezekiel heard the Lord promise healing for the medical condition we know as cardiomyopathy. The myocardium or heart muscle becomes rigid or thick so that it is incapable of pumping blood through the body. The surgical cure is a heart transplant, something Ezekiel never could have imagined, but which he perfectly described. The biblical metaphor is at the center of the Wesleyan way.

The Wesleyan tradition finds its focal point in the heart as the Spirit of God redirects our passions, restores our relationships with God and one another, and sets our hearts on fire with the love of God in Christ. John Wesley experienced that transformation at Aldersgate where he felt his "heart strangely warmed." The doctrines he had believed with his brain became a soul-warming fire in his heart.

In his sermon on "The Almost Christian," Wesley proclaimed, "Such a love is this, as engrossed the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties."

"The great question of all, then still remains: Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?" (John Wesley)

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: In the Wesleyan tradition, the heart of the matter is always a matter of the heart.

Evening Prayer:
Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
Come quickly from above;
Write thy new name upon my heart,
The new best name of Love. (Charles Wesley)

When the Heart Grows Hard

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish

Tuesday, September 8

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Ghost, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy Holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.* (Book of Common Prayer)

Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:15 (CEB)
For this people's senses have become calloused, and they've become hard of hearing, and they've shut their eyes so that they won't see with their eyes or hear with their ears or understand with their minds, and change their hearts and lives that I may heal them.

Reflection: Cardiomyopathy doesn't happen overnight. The hardening of the heart is an insidious infection that sneaks into the heart over time. The heart gradually becomes hard, cold, insensitive to our own needs and the needs of others.

A song in the Broadway musical, *Hair*, confronts the same issue Jesus faced in today's reading:
How can people be so heartless
How can people be so cruel…
How can people have no feelings
How can they ignore their friends
Easy to be hard
Easy to be cold
Easy to be proud
Easy to say no

It can happen to any of us. As we make our way through the

disappointments, conflicts, and temptations of our time, we, like the people Jesus described, can become hard-hearted. We can lose our sense of empathy. There's a lot of that going around today. We need the persistently transformative power of the Holy Spirit to keep our hearts tender, our minds open, and our arms outstretched to enable us to say yes, to allow the love that became flesh in Jesus to become flesh in us.

"Are you a witness of the religion of love?
Are you a lover of God and all humankind?"
(John Wesley, *The Almost Christian*)

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought:
A heart in ev'ry thought renewed
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord of Thine.

Evening Prayer:
Almighty God of truth and love,
To me Thy power impart;
The mountain from my soul remove,
The hardness from my heart.
O may the least omission pain
My reawakened soul,
And drive me to that blood again,
Which makes the wounded whole.

On to Perfection

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish

Wednesday, September 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day:
Refining fire go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul;
Scatter Thy life through every part
And sanctify the whole.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:46–48 (NRSV)
46For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? 48Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Reflection: The Greek word translated as "perfect" is *telios*. It also means *complete, mature or whole.* It is the perfect end or goal toward which our life of faith is always moving.

John Wesley called Christian perfection "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up."

He wrote: "Entire sanctification or Christian perfection is neither more nor less than pure love; love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God. The Refiner's Fire purges out all that is contrary to love."

Paul Chilcote defines sanctification as "the process by which the Spirit makes the child of God more and more like Jesus." (*The Quest for Love Divine*, p. 57)

I've never improved on the words of a farmer in the little congregation I served in Crescent City. When I asked, "How are you doing today?" he replied, "Well, Preacher, I'm not the man I used to be, and I'm not yet the man I'd like to be, but I'm more the man God wants me to be than I've ever been before." That's sanctification!

Are you going on to perfection?
Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?
Are you earnestly striving after it?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Am I becoming more like Jesus today than I was yesterday?

Evening Prayer:
Finish, then, thy new creation; Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation perfectly restored in Thee;
Changed from glory into glory till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Unquenchable

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish

Thursday, September 10

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day:
O that in me the sacred fire
Might now begin to glow;
Burn up the dross of base desire
And make the mountains flow!

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 20:7,9
7O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed…
9If I say, "I will not mention him
or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.

Reflection: Jeremiah spent a night in the stocks because the authorities didn't like what he was saying. (There's nothing new about people in power trying to silence the voices of people who threaten their authority.) But when he was released, Jeremiah was back at it. He couldn't put the fire out.

Similarly, after experiencing the wind and fire on Pentecost, Peter and John ended up in prison. When the authorities tried to silence them, they responded, "It's up to you to determine whether it's right before God to obey you rather than God. As for us, we can't stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19-20)

The love of God that warmed Wesley's heart at Aldersgate became a fire that he could not put out. It ignited a flame of love in the hearts of his followers that came across the ocean to the American continent where it swept like a wildfire across the frontier. It was a fire in the bones of our forebearers in The Florida Conference.

What will it mean for the love of God to become a fire in your heart? In your congregation? In our Conference? In The United Methodist Church?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: To love God with our whole heart means allowing God's love to become a fire we cannot put out.

Evening Prayer: *O Thou who camest from above, the pure celestial fire to impart, kindle a flame of sacred love upon the altar of my heart. There let it for Thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze, and trembling to its source return, in humble prayer and fervent praise. Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work and speak and think for Thee, still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up Thy gift in me.*

The Invitation Is for All

Rev. Dr. Jim Harnish

Friday, September 11

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day:
Love immense, and unconfined,
Love to all of humankind.
Love, which willeth all should live,
Love, which all to all would give,
Love, that over all prevails,
Love, that never, never fails.

Scripture Reading: Luke 14:16–23 (CEB)
16Jesus replied, "A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited
many people. 17When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his
servant to tell the invited guests, 'Come! The dinner is now ready.'
18One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him,
'I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19Another
said, 'I bought five teams of oxen, and I'm going to check on them.
Please excuse me.' 20Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'
21When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master.
The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go
quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and
bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.' 22The servant said, 'Master,
your instructions have been followed and there is still room.' 23The
master said to the servant, 'Go to the highways and back alleys and
urge people to come in so that my house will be filled.

Reflection: Paul Chilcote writes, "The God [the Wesleys] had come to know in Jesus Christ was a God of love who was always reaching out from self to others." (*The Quest for Love Divine*, p.278) In the Wesleyan tradition, loving God with our whole heart is deeply personal but never private. The love we find in Christ is the love that

compels us to reach out to others.

The "open table" at communion is a deeply Wesleyan expression of the love that welcomes anyone and everyone to receive the grace of God in Christ. Charles Wesley published an entire volume of communion hymns. His hymn on "The Great Supper" expresses the Wesleyan passion that reaches out to those who have not experienced God's love.

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;
let ev'ry soul be Jesus' guest.
Ye need not one be left behind,
for God hath bid all human-kind.
Sent by my Lord, on you I call;
the invitation is to all.
Come, all the world! Come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now.

Do I share the Wesleyan urgency to invite others to experience the grace of God and become a follower of Christ?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*

- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: "May we all experience what it is to be, not almost only, but altogether Christians…rejoicing in the glory of God; and have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us!" (John Wesley, *The Almost Christian*)

Evening Prayer:
I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone;
to spend and to be spent for them
who have not yet my Savior known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe Thy love.

Saturday, September 12

Florida United Methodist Young People's Ministry: Rooted Conference 2026

What We Do

Rooted is an annual conference designed to connect leaders to each other, to innovative and inspiring training, to resources, and most importantly, to God. Rooted is the "can't miss" event for anyone involved in children, youth, and family ministry. Whether you are brand new to ministry, a long-time veteran, on the church payroll, or volunteering your time, you will find valuable time in the worship, classes, and community at Rooted.

Rooted is proudly hosted by The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church, the Warren Willis United Methodist Camp and Conference Center, the Ministry Leadership Center, and the Institute for Modern Worship.

Our partnership with the Institute for Modern Worship extends our reach to folks who seek to cultivate their calling to lead worship in many different environments. Rooted focuses on connection. Our worship and workshops help ground our community in our calling. Connecting with God and connecting with each other are what make this event so special.

Ways to Become Involved

The Rooted conference is made possible through the hard work and dedication of our Young People's Ministry Table and our partnerships. The main reason Rooted is successful is the people who attend. The gift of community is one of the biggest blessings of this conference. Help us spread the word to all of the folks who work with our children, youth, young adults, and families in our conference. Make sure your local church encourages the spiritual

development and professional development of these leaders. Also, help prioritize time for leaders in young people's ministry to network with their peers. Together we are stronger.

Ways to Connect

Rooted Conference 2026: September 14 & 15
Warren Willis Camp and Conference Center
RootedUMC.com

Rev. Joel Pancoast, Director of Young People's Ministry
jpancoast@flumc.org

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR SOUL

Week of September 13, 2026

Rev. Debbie McLeod
Retired Elder, The Florida Conference

Sunday, September 13

With relationships come expectations. We expect family members to be respectful and caring. An employer has expectations—what we do and how we do it. We want to know what others expect from us. In Deuteronomy 6 and in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we read the commandment to love God with our whole self: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5, NRSV). As a follower of Jesus, what does it mean for me to love God with all my soul?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

In Tune

Rev. Debbie McLeod

Monday, September 14

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Deck thyself, my soul, with gladness, leave the gloomy haunts of sadness. Come into the daylight's splendor, there with joy thy praises render, unto Christ, whose grace unbounded, hath this wondrous banquet founded. High o'er all the heavens he reigneth, yet to dwell with thee he deigneth.* ~ Johann Frank, 1649. Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1863. UM Hymnal 612

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (NRSV)
[4]Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [5]You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. [6]Keep these words I am commanding you today in your heart. [7]Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and away, when you lie down and you rise. [8]Bind them as a sign…fix them as an emblem…[9]write them on…your gates.

Reflection: "Soul" in Hebrew is *nephesh,* which is the inner self, our thoughts and desires. The Hebrew worldview does not separate soul from body as we see in Greek thought echoed in the Apostle Paul, when Paul suggests the soul wants good and the body has bad desires. "Soul" in Hebrew, and in Jesus' view of this scripture, is the center of our being. I love God best when I am in tune with God's purpose.

In high school, I played violin in two orchestras. At the start of every rehearsal, we would tune. String players matched our A string to an A440. Then each player would draw their bow across two open strings, turning pegs until we had perfect fifths. It became second nature to hear a perfect fifth. With practice, opening ourselves to God through prayer, and listening as we read scripture, we can feel and know when we are in tune with God.

I recently heard a woman yelling at her aging husband as he struggled to get down four steps. Her words and her tone could not motivate anyone. And yet the thought that it was none of my business or the observation that a caregiver was assisting the man were my excuses for doing nothing but staring in horror. Perhaps I could have gone to her and asked her if she would like to take a break with me. Maybe I could have listened to her frustration. My failure created a dissonance in my heart. I was out of tune with God's heart and purposes.

The context of the commandment to love God with all your heart is an ancient affirmation of faith, *"Hear, O Israel, The Lord is God, the Lord is One."* I declare what I believe, *The Lord is God, the Lord is One.* Next, action is required of me, that I *love God with all my soul.* Deuteronomy 6:7–8 describes the ways we keep the commandment to love God. We teach it, live with it, talk about it, write it on the doorway where we can see it coming and going.

How can I love God today with my inner self, my thoughts and desires?
What actions does loving God require of me today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley,

from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Tune my heart to sing your praise.

Evening Prayer: *Forgive me, O Lord, for the opportunities I missed today. Wake me tomorrow to open myself again to your purposes. Amen.*

Alignment

Rev. Debbie McLeod

Tuesday, September 15

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Be still my soul; your God will undertake, to guide the future as in ages past. Your hope, your confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last. Be still my soul: the waves and winds still know the Christ who ruled them while he dwelt below.*
~ Katherina von Schlegel, 1752, translated by Jane Borthwick, 1855. UM Hymnal 534, verse 2

Scripture Reading: Mark 12:28–31 (NRSV)
28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one
another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him,
"Which commandment is the first of all?" 29 Jesus answered, "The
first is 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30 you shall
love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 The second
is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other
commandment greater than these.

Reflection: A car has four wheels. At our tire store, a knowledgeable person makes careful adjustments to the angles of the wheels so that they are perpendicular to the ground and parallel to each other. When the wheels of the car are "in alignment," they make better contact with the road. The car handles better. The tires are protected from uneven wear. If one or more of the wheels is "out of alignment," the steering wheel pulls to the side, the tires are less safe, and we use more fuel.

When Jesus is asked which commandment is the first, he quotes Deuteronomy 6, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."*

I have a hard time understanding the difference between loving God with my whole heart (*kardia*, Greek) and my whole soul (*psyche*, Greek). It's all that stuff inside that feels and connects and sometimes causes me to tear up when I do not know why. I get out of alignment with God when I let the voices of others override my conscience. When I know a prevailing viewpoint is wrong, it may be easier for me to remain quiet. Yet, if I do not allow God's spirit to adjust my inner being, it is as if the steering wheel of my life is pulling me into a ditch.

What do I allow to pull me away from time with God and scripture?
What does it feel like, to me, to be "out of alignment" with God?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Guide me, Holy One.

Evening Prayer: *As I put down the tasks of today, help me to rest, knowing my heart and soul belong to you, O God, now and forever. Hold me in the palm of your hand. Amen.*

Fill My Cup, Lord

Rev. Debbie McLeod

Wednesday, September 16

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord. Come and quench this thirsting of my soul. Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more, fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole.* ~ Richard Blanchard, 1959, UM Hymnal 641

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25–27 (NRSV)
[25]Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" [26]He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" [27]He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

Reflection: My first appointment was to Wesley United Methodist Church in Coral Gables, Florida in 1985. I had heard that Richard Blanchard had been pastor at Wesley when he wrote his hymn, *Fill My Cup, Lord.* Rev. Blanchard was serving in Orlando, so I called him one morning and asked him to tell me the story. He told me it was late afternoon on a weekday. He was expecting a couple who had made an appointment to come see him about their wedding. They never showed. He became more and more frustrated as he waited. Finally, he decided to go upstairs to one of the Sunday School rooms and sit at the piano. Rev. Blanchard told me that he wrote many hymns, but this was the only one that just poured out of him, word and melody. As his fingers were led along the keyboard, his frustration melted away. *Like the woman at the well, I was seeking, for things that could not satisfy. And then I heard my Savior speaking— "Draw from My well that never shall run dry."*

Have you ever turned to God in prayer when you were really frustrated? If so, what happened? What frustrations will you face today and how can you love God with all your soul in the middle of frustration?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Let me remember to turn to you, O God, when things do not go as planned, when I am not happy with the way things are. Let me give my soul to you. Reshape me.

Evening Prayer: *The day has been full of events and thoughts, with the needs of others and my own ideas of what I wanted to accomplish. Help me put all of that down and allow me to rest my soul in the awareness of your presence with me throughout this night. Amen.*

Practicing the Presence of God

Rev. Debbie McLeod

Thursday, September 17

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *When peace like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul. It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.* ~ Horatio G. Spafford, 1873, UM Hymnal 377

Scripture Reading: Matthew 22:34–40 (NRSV)
34When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.

Reflection: One of my children was still in diapers when I discovered the fifteenth-century French, Roman Catholic Brother Lawrence. I was doing research for a sermon series on prayer when I encountered Lawrence. Of limited education, Lawrence was deployed to the kitchen in his community. He discovered that if he contemplated God's gaze upon him while he washed dishes, he experienced profound peace. Lawrence took up menial chores, sweeping the floor, scouring a pot, while "practicing the presence of God." I went home that day to the busy evening hours of caring for two young children and making dinner, bath time, reading stories, all while trying to practice the presence of God. I thought about how I could partner

with God in changing my toddler's diaper, which filled my tired self with gratitude for this sweet boy, and thankfulness for the time I had with my children at the end of their day. Using wipes to clean poop off the bottom of a wiggly baby is not typically a spiritual experience. Yet I learned in that season, that if I allowed God to be present with us, I could serve God with my whole self, even in diapering a little one.

If I imagine, like Lawrence, God's gaze upon me in the menial, repeated activities of daily living, how might my soul be filled? Try it, for one minute, for five minutes, or more. Try it while listening to someone talk.

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: What is before me this afternoon, this evening that I do not really want to do? Watch me, O Patient and Holy One. Help me be aware of you.

Evening Prayer: *Thank you, O God, for watching me even when I was not aware of you today. Help me learn gratitude even for the menial tasks and forgettable moments. Amen.*

Trusting My Soul to God

Rev. Debbie McLeod

Friday, September 18

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine. Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away, O let me from this day be wholly thine. Amen.* ~ Ray Palmer, 1875, UM Hymnal 452

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25–29 (NRSV)
25Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." 28And Jesus said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live. 29But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Reflection: A rich time in my life was when I served in Fort Lauderdale at a church with big ministries among families who were unhoused, persons at the county jail, and with men and women trying to get free from addictions, especially young people from a nearby prison release/halfway house. I had so many conversations with people recommitting their lives to Christ or making a first-time profession of faith. Our senior pastor, Dick Wills, often explained to people that to make a commitment of faith was to *"give as much of yourself as you can, to as much of God as you understand."* I watched so many people with a deep longing for a new start standing with their toes on the precipice of what Søren Kierkegaard called "the leap of faith." In their fear and longing, they would gather up their courage and fling themselves, heart and soul *(as much of themselves as they could)* towards *as much of God as they understood.* Then followed tears,

snot, sighs of relief, a tentative smile, and a person who was growing day by day in their trust of God. (Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling,* 1843)

Are there crevices of my soul that I keep from you, O God? Do I live hoping you won't remember or do not see what I hold back from you? With what I have on my calendar today, with the responsibilities I carry, how can I give of my whole self to your purposes this day, Jesus?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: What of my inner being do I withhold from God?

Evening Prayer: *Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me…Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Amen.*

Saturday, September 19

Reconciling Ministries

What We Do

Reconciling Ministries is a witness of welcome that exists to create a church where all God's children are fully welcomed, affirmed, and celebrated. Rooted in the conviction that every person is of sacred worth, this ministry works to extend the radical hospitality of Christ to LGBTQ+ persons, their families, and allies within the life of the church. We encourage congregations to move beyond statements to lived practices of inclusion—where worship, fellowship, mission, and leadership reflect the diversity of God's people. By offering resources, conversation, and support, Reconciling Ministries helps churches embody Christ's reconciling love, creating safe and courageous spaces where people can grow in faith and live out their discipleship authentically.

Ways to Become Involved

There are many ways for individuals and congregations to participate in this ministry of welcome. Churches can choose to join the Reconciling Ministries Network, making a public commitment to be spaces of hospitality and inclusion. Leaders and members can engage in study groups, book discussions, or workshops that explore scripture, theology, and lived experiences, opening pathways for deeper understanding.

Individuals may serve as advocates by telling their stories, supporting LGBTQ+ persons and families, and working to ensure that every person feels valued in the life of the church. Congregations can host prayer gatherings, listening sessions, or educational events that build bridges and foster healing. Above all, involvement begins with relationships—listening with humility, walking alongside one another, and extending the grace of Christ.

By participating in Reconciling Ministries, churches and leaders bear witness to the hope of a fully inclusive church where every child of God knows they belong.

Ways to Connect

www.sejumc.org/umvim

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR MIND

Week of September 20, 2026

Rev. Magrey deVega
Senior Pastor, Hyde Park UMC, Tampa

Sunday, September 20

We recognize the Great Commandment as the fullness of God's love with one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is most evident in Mark's gospel, which contains all four capacities (Mark 12:30). However, it is interesting that in Deuteronomy, on which Jesus based this commandment, the word "mind" is omitted in most translations (Deut. 6:5). It is possible that the gospel writers, speaking to a first century Greco-Roman world, added the category of "mind" because of the Greek and Roman emphasis on wisdom, reason, and intellect. Regardless of the reason for this addition, it is an important one. As Christians, we don't need to check our brains at the door when we enter the spiritual journey. We can (and should) follow Jesus with our full intellect, complete with our questions, skepticisms, and doubts. Each of the readings this week explores different dimensions of what it means to love God with our whole mind, which will shape both our belief and our behavior.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

The Beginning of Wisdom

Rev. Magrey deVega

Monday, September 21

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, thank you for the capacity to discern your ways, and the strength to follow you. Renew my commitment to your will, that I might discover your wisdom in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 9:10–12 (CEB)
The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord;
the knowledge of the holy one is understanding.
Through me your days will be many;
years will be added to your life.
If you are wise, it is to your benefit;
if you are cynical, you will bear it all alone.

Reflection: You might find it interesting that in the Bible, wisdom is more than just being smart, older, or more experienced. In fact, wisdom is constituted by more than what is in your head. Biblically, to be wise is to have your whole life shaped by the mind of God. The wise person in the Bible is the one who allows God to dictate how one lives every area of one's life.

Throughout Psalms and Proverbs we hear the phrase, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Biblical wisdom is not found in textbooks or laboratories, but in following God. *Fearing* God, in this sense, does not involve being afraid of God, but following God, as the Israelites did in the wilderness with the cloud and pillar of fire.

In other words, the opposite of wisdom in the Bible is not stupidity or ignorance. It is foolishness and folly. In the original biblical languages, these words mean arrogance, wickedness, and deviance from God's path. It is a life lived contrary to the way and will of God.

This is why when we think of wise Christians, we shouldn't just think of people who know a lot about the Bible, or who can speak long discourses about spiritual things, or who are very knowledgeable about theology. Wise Christians are those whose life is consistent with what they profess, whose example reinforces what they claim to believe.

In what areas of my life do I need to do a better job of following God's ways?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God has given me a mind to discern God's ways, and a will to follow them. Am I using both fully today?

Evening Prayer: *God, as I reflect on this past day, bring to mind evidence of when I did not fully follow you. Help me do better tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

A Discerning Mind

Rev. Magrey deVega

Tuesday, September 22

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, give me a listening mind. Give me a mind so in tune with your will and your way that all other sounds both in the world and in my life are subverted by the signal strength of your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 3:5–10 (CEB)
The Lord appeared to Solomon at Gibeon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask whatever you wish, and I'll give it to you." Solomon responded, "You showed so much kindness to your servant my father David when he walked before you in truth, righteousness, and with a heart true to you. You've kept this great loyalty and kindness for him and have now given him a son to sit on his throne. And now, Lord my God, you have made me, your servant, king in my father David's place. But I'm young and inexperienced. I know next to nothing. But I'm here, your servant, in the middle of the people you have chosen, a large population that can't be numbered or counted due to its vast size. Please give your servant a discerning mind in order to govern your people and to distinguish good from evil, because no one is able to govern this important people of yours without your help." It pleased the Lord that Solomon had made this request.

Reflection: Some researchers have suggested that there is one critical difference between the things that we forget and the things that we remember from what we learned in school. The difference is not merely in what you memorize, but what you internalize—between the facts that you commit to memory, and that which you choose to engage and integrate into your life. That makes sense, doesn't it? It is one thing to memorize the countries and their capitals, or the parts of the human cell, or how a bill becomes a law. Those things tend to

fade over time without use. But when you seek to truly understand the subject matter, own it, and make it a part of your life, then those things that you learn can stay with you for the rest of your life.

That distinction was at the heart of Solomon's request. "Please give your servant a discerning mind in order to govern your people and to distinguish good from evil." That Hebrew word "discerning" is the Hebrew word *shema,* one of the most important words in the Hebrew lexicon. It means "to hear" or "to listen."

It occurs over a thousand times in the Bible, and most of the time it is translated as hearing and listening. And every time, the act of hearing the commandments of God is an active exercise, in which one perks up their ears, hones their attention, focuses on God, and then offers a response. To hear in this way was never a passive experience, like the way you listen to music on your smartphone. It is an experience that demands concentration, and then requires action, like listening to GPS navigation on your smartphone.

That word is the same as what is in Solomon's request. And it should be at the center of how you love God with your whole mind as well.

How will I attune my full awareness to what God wants me to hear and do today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley,

from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: I should silence all voices but those from God, so that I can hear what God is calling me to become and do throughout this day.

Evening Prayer: *Almighty God, as I reflect on this day, I remember many conversations I had with people along the way. For the times I have caused harm, empower me to seek reconciliation. For the times others have shared words of love with me, remind me to express gratitude. And in all times when you speak to me, grant me greater receptivity to the work of your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Is It Okay to Doubt?

Rev. Magrey deVega

Wednesday, September 23

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, help me to name my doubts, but not to repress them. Open my mind fully to your wisdom, so that I can be fearless in asking the questions you are surely welcome to receive, that I might grow stronger in my faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: John 20:19–29 (NRSVUE)
When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 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."

Reflection: There is room in our faith to have doubt. It is possible

to be biblically wise and have room for questions. Remember, the opposite of biblical wisdom is foolishness, not doubt. You can still be wise and have questions, as long you do not choose to let go of your faith entirely, or, worse yet, live a life in direct contrast to the ways and will of God. You can have doubt, but you must still love, and you must still devote yourself to God, and serve others.

The story of Thomas teaches us this lesson. When Jesus noticed his doubt, he offered a solution. He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."

Here's the principle: In those moments when we find it difficult to act on our faith because we do not believe, then we must act on our faith until we believe. We often think that because there is doubt in our life, we are unable to pray, unable to worship, unwilling to read the scriptures, unwilling to serve and give of ourselves. We think, "Well, if we don't believe it, we can't act on it."

This story reminds us in those times that it is permissible, even advisable, that we continue to act and behave as if we believed because eventually those actions will lead to the point where we do believe.

So if your doubt is preventing you from praying, pray until you believe. If your doubt is keeping you from loving someone else, love them until you believe in love again. If your doubt is keeping you from worshiping God fully, then that's all the more reason to come to worship.

Sometimes we like to think that the journey of faith is such that our brains have to have it all figured out before we can practice it. Thomas learned that it's okay sometimes to touch first, and believe second. Act, perform the faith until you are able to claim the faith and watch how the wisdom of God gets resurrected in you.

In those areas of doubt in my faith, how will I practice the faith until I can fully claim it?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: No matter what happens to me, I will remember what I can control, release what I cannot, and surrender my wisdom and my doubts over to God. And I will keep going.

Evening Prayer: *Loving God, as I look back on this day, I have seen moments of full belief, and moments of wavering skepticism. I entrust the fullness of what I have experienced to you, acknowledging my full humanity, in which you are ready to reveal your resurrection. Grant me restful sleep, that I might be fully awake to your blessings tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Faith and Reason

Rev. Magrey deVega

Thursday, September 24

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, help me to embrace you with my heart and mind, with both faith and reason, that I might experience the fullness of your wonder, beauty, and wisdom all around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:10–17 (NRSVUE)
Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been made clear to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God[a] that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel—and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

Reflection: John Wesley built much of his theology on the "via media," the way in the center between opposite ideas. As United Methodists, we have a vital balance between:

- A passion for both saving souls to go to heaven and saving lives to flourish here on earth.
- A passion for caring for people's spiritual condition as well as people's physical condition.

- A passion for both individual salvation as well as transforming the systems, cultures, economies, and civic structures that affect people's lives.
- A passion for engaging the faith and reading the scriptures with both the heart and the mind.
- A passion for following Jesus through both faith and reason, and an embrace of both religion and science.
- A passion for both truth and compassion, doctrine and mission.

In other words: both/and, not either/or. That way in the center is the very heartbeat of what it means to be United Methodist. It is founded in a faithful balance among the Bible (which is our primary authority) along with the traditions of Christian teaching, contemporary experience, and intellectual reason. It is what we call the Quadrilateral, the four-fold method of inquiry that we use to navigate polarizing extremes into a vital way in the center, the via media.

How will I keep a balance between my heart and mind today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: All around me are opportunities to use my

intellect as a vehicle for my faith.

Evening Prayer: *Gracious Lord, this day has been full of new learnings and experiences. Help me to process those discoveries through my commitment to you, that I might live out the lessons of your Spirit tomorrow, and every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Keeping an Open Mind

Rev. Magrey deVega

Friday, September 25

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, amid the hatred and division in our world, help me to practice a reasonable faith, a principled love, and an open mind. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 3:8–16 (NRSVUE)
Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For

"Those who desire to love life
and to see good days,
let them keep their tongues from evil
and their lips from speaking deceit;
let them turn away from evil and do good;
let them seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. Maintain a good conscience so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Reflection: One of my more memorable Sundays at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida took place on March 19, 2017, when about a dozen members of the infamous Westboro Baptist Church conducted one of their notorious protests on the perimeter of our property. Westboro Baptist and its founder Fred Phelps are a cultic, ultra-extreme, religiously-affiliated hate group who has targeted non-Christians, atheists, LGBTQ persons, and many others.

When we got word they were coming earlier that week, I remember thinking, "Why us?" What problem could they possibly have with our congregation? Then someone directed me to their website, announcing their plans. It turns out, they had a problem with one of our six core values that we have prominently displayed on our website. They didn't focus on how we were Christ-centered and biblically rooted, or warm-hearted, connection-committed, or mission-directed. The one core value they had a problem with? Open-minded.

They said, "We are coming to Hyde Park United Methodist this Sunday because they are so open minded that their brains have fallen out." I remember thinking, "Honestly, we couldn't ask for better publicity than that."

Open-mindedness begins with being centered in Jesus and rooted in the Scriptures, and then it allows us to be open to a diversity of ideas, perspectives, and viewpoints, when it comes to matters of peace, justice, and responsible living today.

As it turned out, when the dozen or so Westboro protesters showed up, so did counter-protesters. A lot of them. Over 70 people showed up from around the Tampa Bay area to stage a non-violent, loving counter witness to the hatred of Westboro Baptist Church. Some came with signs, some in rainbow colored clothing, some dressed in angel's wings, all to say that love will prevail.

They were ready, in 1 Peter's words, to provide a ready defense to the way of love, with gentleness and respect.

Some folks who showed up to our church to counter-protest even decided to come back to check us out on a regular Sunday. They said that if this church was good enough to be protested by a hate group like Westboro, then it must be good enough for them. And some folks even joined because of it. If we are so open-minded so as to draw people like them, then it's all worth it in the end.

How will I be a witness today to a reasonable faith and an open mind, which can draw spiritually skeptical people to Jesus?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the

communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: In all I do and say, I can be a beacon of hope, and a source of light, for those who are searching.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for this past day. With all its highs and lows, I can look back and see evidence of your strength and comfort. Grant me rest, that I might greet a new day with energized eyes and renewed vision. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Saturday, September 26

Florida Southern College

What We Do

Florida Southern College (FSC), in the heart of Lakeland, is one of two United Methodist-related institutions of higher education connected to The Florida Conference and the broader United Methodist Church. The mission of FSC is to prepare students through dynamic engaged learning to make a positive and consequential impact on society. The mission also includes preserving the world-renowned Frank Lloyd Wright campus and visitor program.

Florida Southern College has a bold vision statement, believing it will achieve national recognition for providing a transformational education for students through its distinctive synthesis of liberal arts and professional programs and focus on student development through co-curricular and service learning programs. With more than 3,000 students, FSC promises a 99% post-graduate placement for their students and a promise to graduate in four years.

Maintaining its affiliation with The United Methodist Church, FSC will continue to serve as the denomination's preeminent mid-sized institution, with a steadfast commitment to fostering the spiritual growth and development of its students. The vision also includes preserving the College's iconic and historically significant Frank Lloyd Wright structures, which serve as a "living museum" and integral part of the campus experience, while expanding living-learning programs and educational opportunities that honor and perpetuate the legacy of America's greatest architect.

Ways to Become Involved

There are many ways to support Florida Southern College and its students. Individuals and churches can contribute to the annual fund

or provide scholarship support, connect with and encourage students in the Lakeland area, or participate in the College's annual Christmas Gala. United Methodist churches from across The Florida Conference are invited to bring groups to this special celebration, where the collective instrumental and vocal talents of students and faculty in the FSC Department of Music are showcased in a spectacular Christmas program. To learn more about opportunities to engage with Florida Southern College, contact the Office of Church Relations.

The Office of Church Relations was established to strengthen and deepen the relationship between Florida Southern College and The United Methodist Church, particularly The Florida Conference. The office serves as a liaison between the College and the Church, offering programs for United Methodists of all ages both on campus and within local churches; encouraging and assisting United Methodist young people as they consider Florida Southern as a place to pursue their education; and serving as a resource to the Conference and its churches.

Ways to Connect

Michael Standifer, Director of Church Relations
863-680-4756
mstandifer@flsouthern.edu
www.flsouthern.edu/alumni-and-giving/giving/make-a-gift

LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH

Week of September 27, 2026

Rev. David McEntire
Retired Elder, The Florida Conference

Sunday, September 27

John Wesley, for all he believed and accomplished, was clear about what was of primary importance to him. He sought to know God's love and to love God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind. He writes in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,*

> *"In the beginning of the year 1738, as I (John Wesley) was returning from thence, the cry of my heart was, 'O grant that nothing in my soul may dwell, but Thy pure love alone! O may Thy love possess me whole, my joy, my treasure, and my crown! Strange fires far from my heart remove; my every act, word, thought, be love!'"*

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Because God First Loved Us

Rev. David McEntire

Monday, September 28

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, there are so many distractions in my life. I have pursuits, deadlines, appointments, and obligations which crowd my life. And yet, I know that the most important thing I can do is spend time with you, going deeper in our relationship. Help me, Lord, to grow in my love for you. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:16–19 (ESV)
16So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19We love because he first loved us.

Reflection: When a child is born and surrounded by love, it is natural for that child to love in return. It may begin simply with a smile, a coo or even a loving look, but it comes when that child sees and experiences that they are loved. And as we learn more about God's love for us, our love for God deepens.

Scripture reminds us that God has loved us first and that love leads us to loving God. As 1 John reminds us, "We love because he first loved us." Our natural response to God's love is often simple joy and a desire to love God in return. Over time, if we pursue that love, it deepens and becomes more intimate. God's love for us has no limits, no boundaries, it is unconditional. So, if we feel unloved, the problem lies within us. Our struggle is the tendency to let everything else distract us. Guilt, busyness, and sin can capture our attention, our

focus. When that happens, we may ignore, even forget the immensity of God's love. Still, when we turn back, God is there, loving us. A lifetime of loving God begins with God's love for us. How wonderful is His grace!

What is distracting me from experiencing the immense love of God?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Loving God leads me to loving others and loving myself.

Evening Prayer: *This evening, as the day ends and rest begins, I thank you that you first loved me and I pray, Lord, that I have loved you with more of my mind, heart, soul, and strength. Amen.*

What a Wonderful World

Rev. David McEntire

Tuesday, September 29

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, I am learning slowly, but surely, that there is evidence of Your love all around me, images of Your grace. I am reminded that I am one of those images, one of those reminders of Your love. May my love for You grow today and every day. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:26 (CSB)
Look up and see! Who created these? He brings out the stars by number; he calls all of them by name. Because of his great power and strength, not one of them is missing.

Matthew 10:29–31 (ESV)
[29]Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. [30]But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. [31]Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Reflection: Louis Armstrong's classic stirs a familiar truth,

I see trees of green, red roses too.
I see them bloom, for me and you.
And I think to myself,
What a wonderful world.

There is something wonderful about God's creation and it is a constant reminder of Him. If we take the time to lift our eyes, even in the midst of life's challenges, there is so much that is wonderful in our world. Scripture reminds us that we are created from the very breath of God, an act of love. When we begin to realize that we are a precious part of that creation, our feeling toward God changes.

When we learn that every aspect of that creation is important to God and we begin to understand that we, too, are very important—so important that even the hairs on our heads are numbered, that we are of incredible worth—then we are drawn to God. Here in that drawing we find our love for God deepening.

Lift your eyes, look around. This is a wonderful world, and you are loved. You are called to love the One who created you.

To grow in your love for God, consistently engage in spiritual disciplines such as prayer and reading Scripture. Worship God, serve others, express gratitude for His blessings, and build a supportive community of faith. Cultivating an understanding of God's nature, character, and will through these practices helps deepen your personal connection and affection for Him.

If I lift my eyes, where will I see God today?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: I have within me the breath of life. God is the essence of my spiritual DNA.

Evening Prayer: *Lord, I saw you today—when I lifted my eyes. I remembered that I am far more valuable than the sparrows. And I am drawn to you, to your love, and I have found my love for you deepening. Tomorrow, Lord, I will look and remember again. Amen.*

Who Am I?

Rev. David McEntire

Wednesday, September 30

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, the more I consider your love for me, the more I am overwhelmed. Through Jesus, the depth of your love goes beyond my understanding. When I look to You, I know that you love me and in that love I discover who I am.*

Scripture Reading: Psalm 8:3–5 (CEB)
[3]When I look up at your skies, at what your fingers made—the moon and the stars that you set firmly in place— [4]what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? [5]You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur.

Reflection: In the musical version of *Les Misérables,* Jean Valjean struggles with his identity. He asks, "Who am I?" The disparity between his old life as a prisoner and his new life as a prosperous businessman leaves more questions than answers. He has experienced God's grace through a remarkable act of forgiveness by a priest. Yet he still struggles with forgiveness. Jean Valjean is tied to his past by a sense of guilt, perhaps a feeling that he is unworthy of unconditional love. Eventually he will come to see that God's love is not conditional.

"Who am I?" This question comes to all of us. The answer begins with remembering that God's grace is the gift of unconditional love, love at the max. Plainly put, God will never love you more and God will never love you less than God does right now. Each of us must begin to see ourselves as God sees us. Therein lies our identity. We are God's sons and daughters, His children. We have been created out of God's love, and that love has been made real in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, that love defines who we are.

Who am I? How does God's love help me answer that question?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: No matter what others say or do, I am a child of God, loved and wonderfully made.

Evening Prayer: *Lord of all creation, I am coming to know more and more about Your immense love for me. You have made me only slightly less than divine; You have crowned me with glory and grandeur. I find myself, more and more, loving You with all my mind, heart, soul and strength. Amen.*

Love That Overflows

Rev. David McEntire

Thursday, October 1

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Today, Lord, I pray that I will begin and end with You. That my love for You will fill my life, my thinking, my actions, my words, and my heart. I pray that my love for You will be primary and that all I do, say or think will be a reflection of that love. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Mark 12:30 (NRSVA)
"you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Reflection: Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees. Matthew 22:34–40 tells us that the Pharisees took up the challenge to discredit Jesus. One of them, a specialist in the law, asked a test question.

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

Jesus replied, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

It would seem that the question is answered—but keep reading, because Jesus tells us why these commands are so important: **"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**

In other words, nothing else makes sense—nothing else works—if you don't put these commands first: love God and love everyone else with everything you've got.

John Wesley in *The Almost Christian* wrote about this.

> *"Such a love is this, as engrosses the whole heart, as rakes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. He that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually 'rejoiceth in God his Saviour.'"*

Wesley discovered that loving God fills your very being and leads to the overflowing joy which gives us the desire to love your neighbor and to love ourselves. Simply put, begin by loving God and everything else will follow.

Where do I begin? Is it my schedule, my desires or do I begin with God?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Everything else makes sense when you begin with loving God.

Evening Prayer: *Tomorrow, Lord, I will begin again. Give me rest and the desire to begin with you. Fill my rest and my waking moments with your love. Amen.*

Loved While We Were Still Sinners

Rev. David McEntire

Friday, October 2

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Lord, when all is said and done with my life, I pray that I have sought to love You with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. For in loving You my heart is deeply stirred. I am led to declare, "Amazing love! How can it be, that Thou, my God, should die for me?" Today, help me to draw closer to your grace. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:4–9 (NIV)
[4]But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, [5]made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. [6]And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7]in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. [8]For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—[9]not by works, so that no one can boast.

Reflection: Each time I led the liturgy for communion I felt a heaviness when we reached the prayer of confession, that moment when we admit that we have fallen short in so many ways. If the liturgy had ended there, we would head home defeated. But we continued and I found myself pausing at the phrase, **"Christ died for us while we were still sinners…"**

Then came that powerful affirmation, **"this proves God's love toward us"** (Romans 5:8). A plain and powerful reminder of God's love followed by the affirmation that we are forgiven, that I was forgiven.

Paul in writing to the believers in Rome, wanted them to understand

that we are to love God, not out of fear or obligation. We love God because God has shown us the depth of His unconditional love, even when we were at our worst. We live in a world where some are favored, and most are not. But in God's Kingdom all are favored, loved. This understanding is life changing. When John Wesley finally connected with God's grace, it was tangible, powerful, "heart warming."

He understood that God's love was demonstrated in sending Jesus to die for humanity—not when people were righteous or worthy, but when they were still sinners, separated from God. This is my story—our story. We are all the sinners who have been saved by the atoning death of Jesus Christ. No wonder Wesley wrote, *"O grant that nothing in my soul may dwell, but Thy pure love alone!"*

If I know that Jesus has died for me and that I am forgiven, how does this affect my love for God?

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: Nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:39)

Evening Prayer: *Tonight, Lord, I can sleep in peace, in the certain and sure knowledge that you love me and that you have forgiven me, even when I fall short of your glory. I pray that my love for you is heartfelt, increased by the growing realization of your amazing love for me. Amen.*

Saturday, October 3

Disabilities Awareness Ministry Team

What We Do

The Disabilities Awareness Ministry Team will show through communal efforts that any disability has a unique ability, as God gives us all strengths. Reestablished in 2021, the FLUMC Disability Awareness Committee comprises individuals (both laity and clergy) from across the conference who have personal experience with the intersection of disabilities and the local church.

We hope our passion will ignite our local churches to be a safe and welcoming place for individuals with disabilities to be fully connected in all areas of ministry. Our goal is not ministry for those with disabilities but rather for those who have disabilities to serve in ministry. We remain steadfast in our commitment to examining the presence of ableism in our theology and its impact on the disabled community while advocating for positive change.

We are also dedicated to working collaboratively to provide education, training, and implementation of ministry for members of the disabled community in congregations. We have renewed our commitment to examine how ableism has found its way into our theology, uncovering its impact on the disabled community and advocating for positive change.

Ways to Become Involved

- Attend a listening session in your district.
- Join our group as a new member and come to our monthly group meetings.
- Make suggestions or share best practices as to what we improve on in disability accommodations as well as disability resources.

Ways to Connect

Elizabeth Hughes & Pam DeDea, Co-Chairs - Disability Ministry Team
flumcdisabilityawareness@gmail.com
www.flumc.org/disability-ministries

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

Week of October 4, 2026

Rev. Kipp Nelson
Pastor, St. John's on the Lake UMC, Miami Beach

Sunday, October 4

We begin this week with the focus of the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself. We believe all humans are created in the image of God, and when we learn to love the people of God, we are simply gaining a fuller image of the divine presence in the world. Learning to love our neighbors is a life-long journey that brings us ever closer to God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray today for...

- *those participating in worship services….*
- *those receiving Holy Communion…*
- *those who will be baptized…*
- *those who will make new commitments or professions of faith…*
- *those living with difficult questions…*
- *those exploring faith…*
- *those who will courageously visit a new faith community, may they be welcomed as Christ himself…*
- *the mission of the Church and our call to grow in love of God and neighbor…*

Abiding in Love

Rev. Kipp Nelson

Monday, October 5

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *New every morning is your love, great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us desire to serve you, to live peacefully with our neighbors, and to devote each day to your Beloved Child, Our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*
(Morning Prayer from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*)

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:7–12 (NRSVUE)
7Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Reflection: God is love. This is the best possible foundation for our spiritual lives. If we believe God to be good and full of abundant love, then it helps us to imagine a world that reflects this same love. When we look at the example Jesus sets for us, love is the standard we are invited to follow. Yet, loving ourselves can be the tallest order of all. Too often, loving the self is hindered by feelings of shame, guilt, or disappointment, and other times it just appears selfish and counterintuitive to our own faith. We must remember that God loves *us* so much that God sent Jesus to show us the extent of that love. This is the starting point for everything else God has called us to do in this life. If we cannot accept God's love for us, it becomes increasingly difficult to extend God's love to others. Let us begin this

week by remembering we ourselves are loved unconditionally, and might we abide in that love throughout our days.

What is hindering me from feeling loved? What internal and/or external voices need to be silenced to receive the voice of Love? How can I practice and receive self-love today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the world**...

- *all the nations…*
- *our own country…*
- *those in authority…*
- *the peace of the world…*
- *racial harmony and justice…*
- *those who maintain order…*
- *those who give a prophetic witness for God's justice…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: I am a beloved child of God and I behold infinite worth.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for all the reminders of your love this day. For the very gift of life and breath, for the earth and all its sustenance, and for all the people that have surrounded me, I give you thanks and praise. When my body, mind, and soul grow tired, remind me of this unending and faithful love. Help me rest easy in this abiding love and may it grant me strength for tomorrow. Amen.*

Stewards of Love

Rev. Kipp Nelson

Tuesday, October 6

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, thank you for the gift of a new day. Wherever the minutes and hours lead me, may every step be taken in and by your love. Help me extend your love to all those I will encounter this day. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 4:8–11 (NRSVUE)
[8]Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. [9]Be hospitable to one another without complaining. [10]Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. [11]Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Reflection: When we hear the word *stewardship* we often think about money and resources. Yet, Peter offers us a new perspective of this concept by encouraging us to be stewards of grace. We are made in the image of God's love, and now we are called to live in love. When we share words and actions of love in this world, we are embodying the very Spirit of God. Love is a gift freely offered to us, and the simple invitation from God is to share and multiply that love in the world around us. Love does not belong to us, but we belong because of love. It is not something for us to hide or hoard, but something to generously share and steward. We exist in, by, and for love. Let us become so captivated by Christ's love that it abundantly overflows through us in our words and deeds. As you live in love, trust that it is the very grace of God at work in you.

In what ways have I stopped the generous flow of God's love? How can I become a better conduit in the flow of God's love? Take time to be grateful for the gift of God's grace and ponder how you might share it with others.

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the community**...

- *those who work…*
- *the unemployed…*
- *those in education…*
- *those in research…*
- *those in communications or journalism…*
- *those who maintain the life of the community…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love is not something to possess, but a mere gift to experience and share.

Evening Prayer: *Gracious God, thank you for your endless grace. Forgive me for all the times I have failed to share your love with others and help me with each new day to love others more fully. Grant me rest and renewal in your grace that I might try to love the world again tomorrow. Amen.*

Near to the Kingdom

Rev. Kipp Nelson

Wednesday, October 7

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Loving God, thank you for the gift of this day. May your love guide my thoughts, words, and actions this day. Let your kingdom come in and through, and even despite me, if necessary. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Mark 12:28–34 (NRSVUE)
[28]One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" [29]Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; [30]you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' [31]The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." [32]Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; [33]and 'to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself'—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." [34]When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Reflection: After searching diligently for the right answers, the scribes finally realize the most important thing they could possibly do, love God and love neighbor. When they discover this deep truth, Jesus tells them, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." Each of us can be like the scribes, spending years and years asking the deep questions and searching for the hidden truths all around us. But the most profound thing we can do in this life is to learn to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus didn't offer these words to confuse anyone, but rather to encourage and inspire them. He said

the Kingdom of God is at hand when we learn to do these things. In other words, as we try to love as God has loved us, the Kingdom of God comes alive in us. It really isn't as complicated as we often make it. Anything outside of loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves is merely a distraction from what truly matters. Love is our only means of experiencing life and the world as God intends.

What is distracting me from the love of God and/or my neighbors?
What is drawing me near to the love of God and my neighbors?
What is one practical thing I can do to prioritize love today?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **personal relationships**...

- *the home, and family life…*
- *children deprived of home…*
- *relationships in daily life and work…*
- *those who are estranged…*
- *those who feel unloved…*
- *all ministries of care…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: To love is to participate in the coming Kingdom of God.

Evening Prayer: *Faithful God, thank you for your steadfast love. For all the ways I have witnessed, and/or participated in, your Kingdom today, I give you thanks. Remind me of your divine power always abiding in me and continually mold me into your likeness. Help me rest in your love, trusting your Kingdom is so very near to us. Amen.*

Hard Love

Rev. Kipp Nelson

Thursday, October 8

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *Dear Lord, help me to love the world today. Even when I don't feel like it, inspire me to be your hands and feet of love. Rid me of all malice, anger, and judgment, and instill in me a heart of peace, compassion, and love. Move me to do your will, today and every day. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: Luke 6:27–31 (NRSVUE)
[27]"But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; [28]bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. [29]If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. [30]Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. [31]Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Reflection: Love is easy when it is regarding the people with whom we agree and share many various commonalities. It is a much more difficult task when it comes to those with whom we strongly disagree and struggle to find any commonality at all. It is especially hard to love people when they have caused harm to us or to those whom we love. Yet, this is the hard love Jesus calls us into. This type of love requires sincere discipline, patience, and faithful reflection at every opportunity. This love invites us to see the beloved image of God in one another and to align our actions accordingly. Hard love is an orientation more than a choice. It is about being so compelled by the love of Christ that our only choice is to love even when it is incredibly hard. John Wesley said this is how we can know if our souls are alive to God. When our lives begin to reflect the love of Christ, even to those who have made life more difficult, we will know we are on our way toward perfection.

Who is my "enemy?" Who do I struggle to love?
How can I commit to love even when it is hard?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the Church**...

- *the Church universal, and local…*
- *the unity of the Church…*
- *the ministries of the Church…*
- *the mission of the Church…*
- *the renewal of the Church…*
- *all who follow Jesus…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: There is not a soul that God does not love.

Evening Prayer: *God, thank you for getting me through this day. Love is hard, and still, I know it is holy. Forgive me for when I have gotten it wrong and continue to teach me your ways with each new day. May your love abound in my soul and grant me peace, freedom, and rest. Amen.*

Love that Reconciles

Rev. Kipp Nelson

Friday, October 9

Call to Praise and Prayer: Open our lips, O Lord, and we shall declare your praise. Glory to you, O God!

Prayer for the Day: *God, let me breathe in your love and release everything contrary to love. Wherever this day leads me, may your love guide my steps. May the fruit of your love become evident in all that I do. Amen.*

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17–21 (NRSVUE)
17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. 21For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Reflection: When we come to know and experience the love of Christ, it is impossible for our lives to not be transformed. This scripture reminds us that encountering Christ brings about a new creation within us. Experiencing the love of Christ helps us to see the world differently and therefore engage with the world differently. We are no longer bound to ways of this world, but still, we remain present in the world for the sake of love. Growing in our love of God will inevitably transpire into a deep love of people. When love becomes our reason for being, we become co-laborers in the work of reconciliation. By receiving the love of God and allowing it to transform us from the inside out, we become ambassadors for Christ. In learning how to love God and our neighbors as ourselves, we get

to help usher in the new creation where all will be reconciled to God and one another. This is evidence of the Spirit at work in us.

How is it with my soul? Do I genuinely desire goodwill toward those around me? Where is the fruit of the Spirit at work in my life? How can I nurture and sustain those areas of my life?

Spend a few moments in stillness awake to the Spirit of God.

Daily Prayers of Intercession: We pray for **the suffering**...

- *the hungry…*
- *migrants and refugees…*
- *prisoners…*
- *the persecuted…*
- *all who bring sin and suffering to others…*
- *all who seek to bring care, relief, and justice…*

We pray for **people in need**...

- *those who are tempted…*
- *those in despair…*
- *those who are sick…*
- *those with disabilities or who have special needs…*
- *those who are enslaved by addictions…*
- *the elderly and the dying…*
- *those who mourn…*
- *all ministries of care and healing…*

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing: As you go about your day may you be *inwardly and outwardly devoted to God; all devoted in heart and life.* (John Wesley, from *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Midday Thought: God's love is at work within me to heal and reconcile the world around me.

Evening Prayer: *Eternal God, you are my Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Thank you for granting me a day full of opportunities to be made new in your love. May the learning from this day bring me ever closer to you and lead me to love as you do. Grant me the assurance of your peace in this ongoing work. Amen.*

Saturday, October 10

Missional Engagement

What We Do

Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves calls us to see every person as a reflection of God's image and to respond with compassion, dignity, and respect. Missional Engagement helps us live out this call by listening closely to communities, recognizing both their needs and their gifts, and walking alongside them in ways that affirm dignity and nurture hope. We partner with congregations to create ministries that provide meals, housing, clothing, and care, while encouraging partnerships with schools, shelters, and community organizations that strengthen neighborhoods and foster belonging. We also support disaster recovery efforts, mobilizing volunteers to clean up, rebuild, and restore homes and churches after hurricanes and storms.

These efforts are part of a larger calling that connects us to global neighbors as well—extending compassion through international partnerships, learning from the witness of churches around the world, and joining with others in responding to human need wherever it arises. In every initiative—whether local outreach, disaster recovery, or international connection—our aim is to make Christ's love visible, to strengthen communities through acts of compassion and justice, and to create spaces where both those who serve and those who are served are transformed by grace.

Ways to Become Involved

There are many ways to live out the call to love your neighbor. You can volunteer with local ministries that provide meals, clothing, or housing, or join mission experiences that connect churches across communities. Congregations may partner with schools, shelters, or neighborhood organizations to extend hospitality and build

meaningful relationships. You can also take part in workshops, retreats, and learning opportunities that deepen your understanding of mission and equip you to serve with compassion and justice. Even simple acts—praying for our neighbors, advocating for those in need, or offering encouragement to those who feel forgotten—help weave the fabric of God's beloved community. Each step of involvement, whether large or small, strengthens our witness to Christ's love and draws us closer to one another.

Ways to Connect

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AWAKENED TO GRACE

Grow deeper in God's love.
Reflect God's grace each day.

To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—and to love your neighbor as yourself—is at the heart of Christian discipleship.

Through scripture, prayer, and daily practice, *The Altogether Christian Devotional* invites you to explore what it means to live a life shaped by love. Each reflection points toward the transforming grace of God that calls us to wholehearted faith, deeper love, and a life poured out for others.

Read it on your own, share it with a small group, or journey through it as a congregation. Wherever you begin, may these reflections draw you closer to God and help you become more fully the person Christ calls you to be.

The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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