

Summer 2022 Prayer Guide

American Idols

This summer, our messages focus on the theme of *idolatry*. While worshiping idols feels like the stuff of ancient times, the truth is, as modern Americans we're *primed* to put our faith in and orient our worship toward the things of this world—money, education, independence, position, health, ideals and ideas, and all our stuff—rather than God.

If we want to combat our American Idolatry, a best practice is to learn to focus on the Maker rather than the made and the Giver rather than the gifts. In short: we beat idolatry when we seek and learn to spot God in every place and every moment of our lives.

This practice reminds us of God's presence and power in this world. To help with this, we've created a prayer guide based on summer lectionary readings from the psalms. Though our church services and messages won't use the lectionary as extensively as we had through the first part of the year, the lectionary rolls on—and provides a helpful structure for this prayer guide.

This guide is flexible—you can tailor it to your schedule or preference. Each date listed is a Sunday as this is the lectionary reading for *that* Sunday. However, you can use the prompt to guide your prayers on a particular day or use it throughout the week before—or after.

Each week/reading begins with the *same* prayer prompts for the entire passage. This is done to spur thoughts even as we read. But each week also focuses on a shorter passage—with passage-specific prompts to encourage creative prayers.

But nothing is rigid. The purpose is to spur creative connections with God over the summer no matter where we are—physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Blessings!

Week 1: June 5

Full reading: Psalm 104: 24-34, 35b

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: What words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 24-25:

How many are your works, Lord!

*In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*

*There is the sea, vast and spacious,
teeming with creatures beyond number—
living things both large and small.*

As summer begins, note the creatures you see—or don't see!—in the air, on the land, and in the lakes, rivers, and seas. What do these creatures reveal about God's wisdom? Bring God your thoughts and questions.

Week 2: June 12

Full reading: Psalm 8

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 3-4:

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
What is humankind that you are mindful of them,
Human beings that you care for them?*

Take time to look into the sky at various parts of the day—but perhaps most particularly at night. How does this ground-up perspective shape how you view yourself, your family, your neighbors, and those around the world? Bring God your thoughts and questions.

Week 3: June 19

Full reading: Psalm 22:19-28

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 27-28:

*All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.*

Whether you are traveling this summer or staying put, consider the folks who live in other parts of this country—or world. Ask God to bring to mind a people group. Wonder: what are these summer (or winter—depending where they live!) days are like for them? Are they peace-filled? Anxious? Now, imagine those folks remembering and turning to God—as we are in this practice! Give thanks to God for God’s rule over the nations and God’s love for all people.

Week 4: June 26

Full reading: Psalm 16

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 1-2:

Keep me safe, my God,

for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;

apart from you I have no good thing."

Remember a time when summer's outdoors activities left you vulnerable to sudden weather—and you running for cover. How did finding refuge from a storm make you feel? Now imagine any current "weather" in your life—stresses or dangers—and see God with you, arms open, ready to shelter you. How does *that* make you feel?

Week 5: July 3

Full reading: Psalm 66: 1-9

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 4-5:

*All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you,
they sing the praises of your name.”
Come and see what God has done,
his awesome deeds for humankind!*

Take a moment to *listen* to the sounds of summer—lawn mowers, kids, water, dogs, thunder, birds, cicadas, fireworks, parties... Imagine God receiving these sounds as praise! Now add your own praise to the mix: What “awesome deeds” have you seen God do—for you, your family, or for others—near and far?

Week 6: July 10

Full reading: Psalm 25:1-10

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 4-5:

*Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.*

Consider the various roads, paths, driveways, and sidewalks in your neighborhood. How do they help you in your daily life? What do they offer? Now, consider God's paths. Why is it important to learn them and let God guide us?

Week 7: July 17

Full reading: Psalm 15

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verse 1:

Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?

Who may live on your holy mountain?

Take a moment to imagine God's "sacred tent" and "holy mountain"? What do you see? What do you hear? How does being in this place make you feel? In what ways does living justly—as the psalm instructs us—usher us into God's tent and onto God's mountain? Have you experienced this? If so, when? If not, take your desire to feel God's presence to God.

Week 8: July 24

Full reading: Psalm 138

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verse 7:

*Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life.*

*You stretch out your hand against the anger
of my foes;
with your right hand you save me.*

Look at your hands. Spread your fingers and wiggle them. Stretch your hands in front of your body. Look at your open palms and then at the backs of your hand. Now, make a fist and relax. Take a moment to thank God for your hands and then imagine: if *our* hands can do all these things (and we've barely covered what hands can do!), what can *God's* hands do? David says God stretches a hand against his enemy's anger—and God's right hand saves us! How else have you experienced the power of God's hands? How do you *need* to feel the power of God's hands?

Week 9: July 31

Full reading: Psalm 49:1-12

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verse 5:

*Why should I fear when evil days come,
when wicked deceivers surround me...?*

For many of us, in the middle of summer, when the sun shines hot and bright on our faces, when paces slow and schedules lighten, it can be difficult to imagine “evil”—or bad days. Even if we’re going through a difficult period, summer leaves room for hope much more than the dismal winter days. Even if today is raining and gloomy, bring to mind a “perfect” day from this summer. Feel the sun on your arms or dew under your feet. See blue skies and red and yellow flowers. Hear the birds chirping and water lapping (somewhere!). Smell the grass clippings or food grilling. Taste the refreshment of cool water or the sweetness of crisp watermelon. How do these things help you understand God’s goodness? How does this goodness help you deal with some of “evil days” you’ve experienced—or perhaps that you anticipate? Thank God for the goodness God shows to the “rich and poor alike” as the broader passage tells us while asking God to be with you in darker days.

Week 10: August 7

Full reading: Psalm 33:12-22

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 13-14:

*From heaven the Lord looks down
and sees all humankind;
from his dwelling place he watches
all who live on earth...*

While heaven may or may not be located “up” in the sky, the psalmists imagined it there—as do we! So, tap into that. Look up into the summer sky and imagine the Lord looking down? What does God see? What delights him? What breaks his heart? What does it mean to *you* that God watches all of us? Take those thoughts to God.

Week 11: August 14

Full reading: Psalm 82

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 3-4:

*Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

Summer can open our eyes to the needs of the world around us. Our slower pace can give us time to pay more attention to causes, protests, or marches—even, Lord willing, open our eyes to the many needs of people around us. What causes or needs have you noticed this summer? What causes or needs might you need to open your eyes and heart more to? After a summer of what we all hope offers extra rest and refreshment, in what ways might God be calling you to “rescue the weak and needy”? Go to God with this.

Week 12: August 21

Full reading: Psalm 103:1-8

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 2-4:

*Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion.*

What is your favorite way to praise the Lord? Do you like to sing your praise? Speak your praise? Shout it? Think, dance, write or paint it? However you love to praise the Lord, take a moment to do it. Then, imagine these “many benefits” of the Lord—that God forgives, that God heals, that God redeems from the pits, and that God crowns us with love and compassion! How has God done that for you? Take a moment to praise God for those acts—this time, try a new way of praise!

Week 13: August 28

Full reading: Psalm 112

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verse 4:

*Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,
for those who are gracious and compassionate
and righteous.*

Imagine the sun coming up—or better yet, choose an early morning and go out to witness it. You don't have to be watching the sun rise over the oceans or mountains to be dazzled. We need only note how the dark sky first turns inky and then brightens—sometimes getting pinky. In mere moments, the darkness of the world is overcome by the light and warmth of the sun's rays. As you bring to mind a "dark" or difficult situation in your own life, place it in this vision. Imagine the warmth and light of God rising and spilling into your situation. How does this make you feel? What does this do to the image of whatever troubles you? Talk to God about this.

Week 14: September 4

Full reading: Psalm 1

Before reading, pray: *Spirit, open my heart, mind, and soul to what you have for me/us in this passage.*

After reading, consider: what words, images, or phrases stuck out? What might God be saying or leading you toward? How might these words or this passage shape your conversations with God this week?

Focus on Verses 1a, 2-3:

Blessed is the one ... whose delight is in the law of the Lord,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither—

whatever they do prospers.

These verses offer a perfect picture as summer comes to an end. We *know* the leaves will wither soon enough—and yet fields are still yielding crops and trees are still bearing the fruit conceived, nurtured, and produced through this season. Take a moment to imagine some of your favorite fruits growing on their trees, shrubs, or vines. Thank God for that goodness. Now, think: What fruits has this season borne in you? In what ways are you more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kinder, better (more good!), more faithful, patient, and self-controlled (Galatians 5:22-23)? What contributed to that? Which fruit do you sense sprouting—or growing still? What fruits would you like to see? Thank God for your growth and ask for a harvest of new “fruit.”