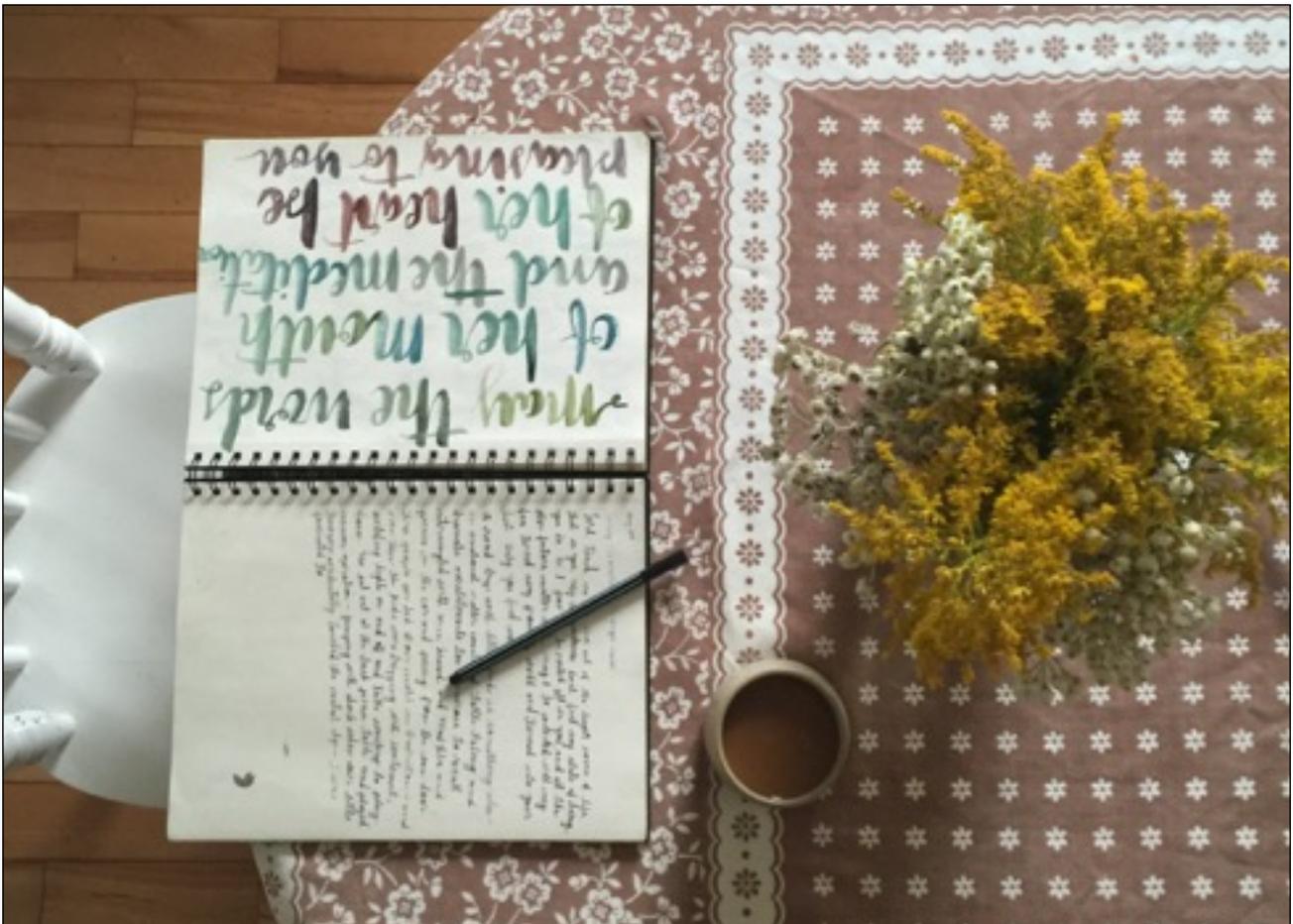


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# Prayer Exercises

Meeting God in Simple Spaces



*A Renovaré Project  
by Vivianne David*

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# Introduction

*For God wishes to be seen,  
and he wishes to be sought,  
and he wishes to be expected  
and he wishes to be trusted*  
Julian of Norwich

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These days, perhaps more than ever, folks are longing for experiential faith. Everywhere I look, people are digging for meaning in the everyday mundane events of life. They're sprinkling sentimentality over their lives, hoping that depth will emerge. But adding a spoonful of sugar to the cereal of life is going about the matter all backwards, if you ask me. Jesus seemed to feel the same way. He consistently used the "holy matter" of everyday existence to point us *beyond* simply what it was, giving us a peep hole into the eternal invisible realm of the spirit. "Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it." (Matthew 11:29) says Jesus, and then proceeds to live an entirely "normal" life in the natural realm, all the while pulling the realm of the Kingdom of God into all his interactions. This is what theologians call *incarnation*. Basically, it's a fancy word for saying the invisible realm of the spiritual reality was made manifest — visible — in a physical being. Jesus knits together the realm we can't see and the realm we can. Then he takes it a step further, and tells us that everything we see can inform us of the Kingdom of Heaven. "It's right here," he essentially says. "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:36) he explains.

"When God took on flesh in Jesus Christ, the uncreated and the created, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human became united. This unity meant that all that is mortal now points to the immortal, all that is finite now points to the infinite. In and through Jesus all creation has become like a splendid veil, through which the face of God is revealed to us," Henri Nouwen states poetically. But it's true! And, this exciting discovery means that the whole world is our classroom, our interactive science lab, so to speak. When we engage with the physical, we learn of the spiritual.

## **What are Prayer Exercises?**

Just as we stretch our physical muscles to develop flexibility, or study a textbook to prepare our minds for a test, so we can engage our spirit in training. Timothy talks to his disciples, advising them to sign up for a gym membership of the spirit, a daily workout in God: "Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." (1 Tim. 4:7-8) In this simple manual, you'll find a diverse selection of interactive activities that invite you to reach out to God by taking hold of simple implements. The idea is that the physical realm is our teaching tool, and by using our senses, we engage in a spiritual shaping of our inner life. Jesus taught by using examples of the simple things that people had daily interaction with: fields, farming, money, food, and family. Today, the symbols that we are familiar with have changed, but we can expect that the Holy Spirit

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would continue to use the things our eyes see, our hands touch, our mouths taste, our ears hear, and our nose smells to instruct us in the ways of who He is.

### ***Inviting Transformation into the Mind/Heart***

For thousands of years, human beings have known that God is asking them to love Him with all their heart, soul and might, as Deuteronomy 6:4 instructs. The verses immediately following this command seem to provide a small handful of ideas about how to do this in practical ways: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9) I can’t help but notice that loving God seems to be something we need to be trained to do, and that having lots of practical ways to be reminded of His Ways is central to a transformed life. Thousands of years later, Paul sings the same tune: “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6) We get to set *our minds* on all sorts of things — anything we choose. Notice that whatever we fill ourselves with starts oozing out into the actions of our lives. As Jesus wisely reminds us, “How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.” (Matthew 12:34,35)

Images, concepts, judgements and inferences — these are the four categories that Dallas Willard groups all that fills our thought life. We feel certain sensations and emotions about those images, concepts, judgements and inferences. This is the centre of our being: our thoughts and feelings. This is where decisions get made, in our heart. So it is of utmost importance *what* we turn our heart towards. And it is fascinating to consider that, just like Jesus, we are spirit and body. Might it be that God intended to show us what living as a spirit in a body was meant to look like when he became incarnate in Christ? If so, we must consider how Jesus interacted with his physical surroundings. And it seems that he was quite engaged with the environment around him. In fact, he engaged with the physical realm constantly, and used it to teach his disciples. Our thoughts and feelings are shaped by the way we interact with our environment. From this foundation, we can see the premise for prayer exercises that engage the senses in forming our hearts.

### ***The Streams as a way of Seeing the Movements of Jesus***

A few years ago, a book came out that revolutionized the way we can wrap our minds around the life of Christ, and the Body of Christ today on earth. It looked at the components of Jesus’ life as a model for becoming apprentices of Christ today. Jesus lived a life of prayer, virtue and compassion. He was filled with the Spirit and the Word of God. He showed us what living in a body could and should look like. This model of six traditions which are expressed in the diverse Body of Christ today were seen by Richard Foster in a vision as six streams flowing together into a mighty river of life. By identifying the major strengths and potential perils of each tradition, we come to appreciate the beauty of the diverse ways in which we can learn from Christ. I’ve categorized all the exercises in this project bases on five of the sic traditions: Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice and Evangelical. The sixth tradition, Incarnational, is really the essence of

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this entire project: making present and visible the realm of the invisible spirit. Needless to say, you're getting a dose of incarnation with every exercise! My prayer is that you'll find yourself noticing the movements of God in new ways through the diversity of exercises and the traditions they highlight. At the end of the project, the index provided will help you identify which prayer exercises correlate with which of the six streams. A diverse blend of exercises will help different folks to be stretched in different ways!

### ***How Can I use the Exercises?***

Each of the exercises has two pages: an Information page, and a Guide page.

- **Information Page:** includes an anecdotal introduction, list of supplies, and questions for either journaling or group discussion. This page is helpful for the person coordinating the use of prayer exercises in one of the ways below.
- **Guide Page:** This is the sheet you'd print out and include alongside the supplies for the participant to follow. The narrative of this page guides the participant through the prayer time, providing prompts for dialogue with God. If I'm setting up a retreat for a small number of people (10-20) I will print the Guide Page and leave it at the station where I've set up the exercise. When I've setup a day of prayer for a larger event, (75-125pp) I provide each participant with a manual of the exercises.

Each exercise was written as a personal space for the participant to engage with God, yet can be used in a communal setting if it's setup as personal prayer spaces. Here are a few ways to include an interactive prayer exercise in a variety of settings:

- **Daily Devotion Time:** Start off your time with God by choosing one of the exercises that you have the supplies within arms reach. Use the questions for personal reflection in your journal.
- **Small Group Focus Moment:** As an opening activity to a small group gathering, provide each person with the supplies needed to do the same exercise simultaneously. Use the discussion questions to open up dialogue of each person's experience.
- **Interactive Church Service:** During the worship time, have a few exercises set up for people to engage with at the sides or back of the sanctuary, with a bit of privacy. Consider the theme of the service to choose exercises that highlight the teaching and worship. The discussion questions could be used to debrief in small groups and pray for each other.
- **Retreat:** Setup a prayer room where participants can spend time interacting with different prayer exercises silently during free time. Or have one segment of time during the retreat designated for prayer exercises. Questions can be used to prompt personal journal reflection.

Have fun, experiment with something new and different, meet God in a new way.



## *Focus Verse: Ruth 1:16*

I often find myself reminding people that their inner and outer selves are fused together, that wherever their body goes, their spirit goes too. Just as we can't leave our shadow behind, neither can we separate our spiritual life from our physical life - they are extensions of each other. The outer steps of our lives are directly related to the inner steps of our lives.

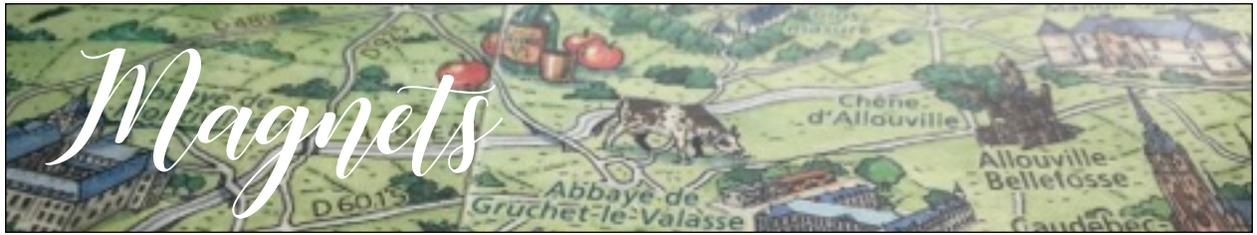
Being aware of God's desire for living life WITH him changes everything about the way we journey in life - first inwardly, and as a result, outwardly. Magnets are a fun way to explore the relationship God wants to awaken us to - a connected life where our whole being is lived in his company.

## *Supplies Needed*

two magnets, any kind of map (from an atlas or road map) check that the two magnets are strong enough to lead each other from either side of the paper.

## *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* *What did you discover about your relationship with God through this practice?*
- \* *What sort of things serve as a reminder that God is with you in daily life?*
- \* *Are there areas of life that you would like to be more open about living with God?*



*Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. (from Ruth 1:16)*

The map represents the journey of life. Many destinations, many different roads to travel. The magnet on the top represents you on the journey of life. Now reach under the map and hold onto the magnet underneath- this is God behind the scenes, not visible to our eyes, yet closer than the breath we breath. Immanuel, God with us.

God's plan all along has been to journey with us, as Jesus reminds us in some of the last words to his disciples: *"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

He wants our prayer to be like Ruth's prayer: *"Where you go, I will go and where you stay, I will stay."* But don't we have our own ideas of where we'd like to go and the best way to get there?

Hold the magnet representing God underneath the map and guide the magnet on top, representing you, to different destinations on the map, talking candidly with God.

## *- Prayer -*

*God, you are with me, journeying with me.*

*But am I living life "with you"?*

*I want to have the heart of Ruth, aware of your presence with me, and inviting your direction and guidance.*

*Teach me your Way, not just in the way I direct my outer steps, but my inward steps too, so I can learn to live with you.*



### *Focus Verse: Jeremiah 31:3-4*

Im always fascinated at the ideas my mind wanders to when i am busy working with my hands. In this creative construction time, the goal is to open up dialogue with God about things he's already as work doing in our lives. Sometimes I forget that God has already begun things in me, regardless of whether or not I notice. Taking the time to stop and become aware is key to participating actively in the work God is doing in our lives.

### *Supplies Needed*

lego blocks

### *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* *Have you ever thought of God as the builder and yourself as the blocks being stacked?*
- \* *How does this perspective expand your vision of God, and your relationship with Him?*
- \* *What did you notice about the type of construction you became?*
- \* *Did you appreciate the variety of design in others' lives?*



*"The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful."  
- Jeremiah. 31, 3-4*

God wants to build you up. As you take the Lego blocks and begin connecting them, allow your mind to wander in prayer conversation with God:

*Lord, what elements are you wanting to bring into my life?  
How are you trying to show me your love through the recent events of my life?*

Give yourself listening space as you work on the Lego; expect that God will show you something new about the journey he is travelling with you.

Set your construction to the side for others to appreciate. Notice how the work God is doing in you is different from the work he is doing in others. Praise him for how his love is displaying itself uniquely in your life.

### *- Prayer -*

*Jesus, may your joy be my joy. I want our wills to be the same.  
I desire to notice you in the everyday work of my life.  
Give me eyes to see what you are building in me.*



## *Focus Verse: Matthew 6:14-15*

Isn't it interesting how quickly we can identify wrongs that have been done to us, yet we seem to turn a blind eye to our role in participating with wrongdoings? We are twisted at the very core of our being, "incurvatus in se," or inwardly curved in upon ourselves. In the most famous prayer ever documented, Jesus teaches us the connection between being givers and receivers of forgiveness; these two concepts cannot be separated. In this simple exercise of taking a symbol in each hand, there is an invitation to explore how wounds of unforgiveness take over our lives, leaving us incapable of living fully. In this prayer to his Father, Jesus shows us that we choose to release others in order to be recipients of forgiveness. This seems illogical to our twisted economics, but over and over we find this simple wisdom to be true. Release is something that can't be forced. This is a delicate subject, yet central to the principles of the Kingdom of God. May you find yourself bathed in His grace so that you can find the strength to forgive, and to experience forgiveness.

## *Supplies Needed*

a selection of lots of little knick knacks that could help jog people's memories. I look through the house and pick up lots of small little things from junk drawers: scissors, chapstick, pen, keys, makeup, little mirror, tape, headphones, birthday candle, swimming badge, golf ball, anything.

## *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* Was it difficult to choose items that symbolized hurt in your life?
- \* Did you discover something in having your hands full of hurt?
- \* What was your experience in letting those symbols of hurt go?
- \* Was it harder or easier than you thought it would be?



The world is broken in many ways:  
Our relationships with others, God, the planet and ourselves.  
What hurtful things have been said to you?  
What hurtful things have been done to you?

Look at all the items before you; choose one that somehow represents this hurt to you.  
Hold it in your right hand.  
What hurtful things have you said? What hurtful things have you done?  
Choose another item that represents this hurt. Hold it in your left hand.

Look at your hands: each full of hurt.  
What do you notice about your hands in this state?

*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will purify us from all unrighteousness.*  
-1 John 1:9

*Jesus said that, "In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part." - Matthew 6:14&15.*

### *- Prayer -*

*Jesus, my hands are full of hurt, and it's harder than I thought to let go, to forgive.  
Help! I don't want my life to become consumed by sin,  
but I know that without you, that is exactly what happens.*

Take the time you need to continue this conversation with God.  
When you're ready, release the hurt others have done to you,  
then release the hurt you've done to others.  
Examine your open, empty hands, praising God that it is for freedom he has set you free!



## *Focus Verse: Genesis 1:26*

Mirrors are strange inventions; they perfectly reflect light back at us. But they reflect nothing more- they have no power to plumb the depths of our being, or reveal to us anything beyond the surface. In today's world, outer appearances are overvalued with time, money and energy.

I thought it would be an interesting experience to look at ourselves through the writing on the mirror, like a filter through which we interpret ourselves. What sort of words does God see us through? What would it do to us if we could get a glimpse of ourselves as God does. And yet, isn't this what he's inviting us to do, making available to us?

## *Supplies Needed*

mirror, dry erase markers, dry cloth or paper towel

## *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* *What did you find difficult in this activity?*
- \* *How might this be an invitation for inner exploration into part of me?*
- \* *Did this activity help me to see God in a new light? myself in a new light?*



*"Then God said, "Let us make man (humanity) in Our image, according to our likeness."  
– Genesis 1:26*

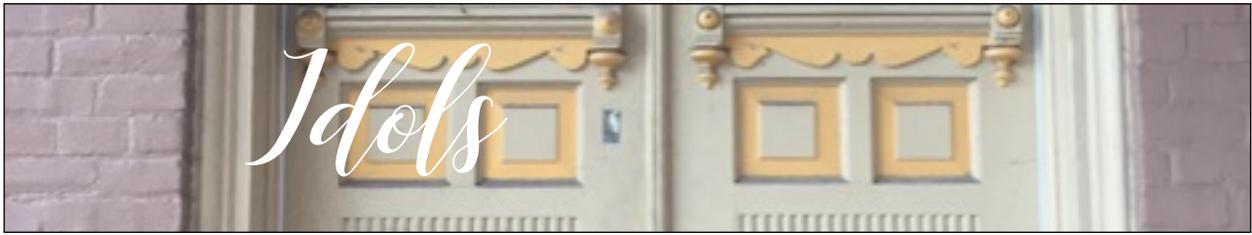
Feel your pulse running through you. What you feel is life! A gift from God, your maker! Look in the mirror. What do you see? Notice the features of your body: the shape of your nose, the colour of your eyes, the places where your skin wrinkles when you smile. When you see yourself do you cringe or do you praise God? Look closely. Ask God to show you the real you. Using the marker, write the truth of what God has shown you about yourself in big letters across the mirror. Look at yourself through this lens, recalling that "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Praise God that he planted something of Himself in you, and that he looks beyond what we notice most, breathing life over the part of himself living in us.

As you wipe away the words on the mirror, pray that they would not be erased so easily from your soul

### *- Prayer -*

*Jesus, you are the word. When you speak, life takes shape.  
I want to welcome you to be the Word of Life in me.  
I want to believe and live by the truth that you speak over me.  
Help me despite my unbelief.*



## *Focus Verse: 1 Samuel 13:21*

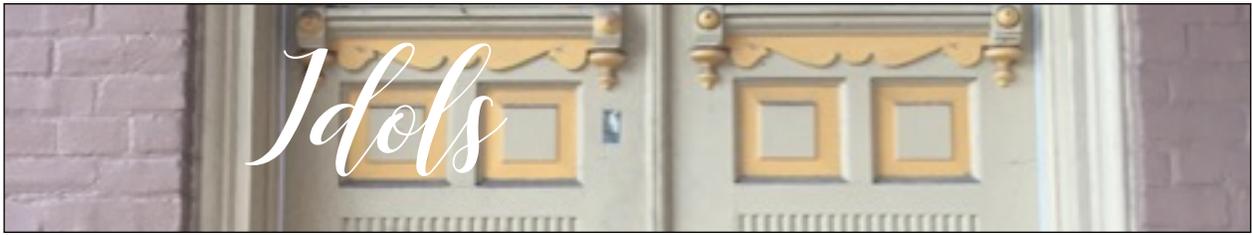
Many of the world religions worship physical idols, graven images. We may think this is a primitive or outdated way of thinking of religion, yet we find ourselves idolizing things in different ways. We may not bow or pray to a figurine, but do we bend our attention towards things that draw our attention away from Christ? Whatever fills the meditations of our hearts and minds indicates those things we honour and value, and anytime it isn't God-centered, is it not in some ways, an idol?

## *Supplies Needed*

modelling clay, plasticine or play dough.

## *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* *Why do you think it is that we are able to recognize the idols in other's lives yet fail to notice those things that take our focus from God?*
- \* *How did it feel to hold the little handmade "idol"?*
- \* *Did some part of you resist smashing the idol at the end? Did smashing it change something in you?*



Take a lump of clay in your hands. As you roll it between your palms, quiet yourself and invite God to make his presence felt.

The clay in your hands represents the resources that are at your disposal, whether they be time, relationships, money, energy or knowledge. The method in which we hold our resources can either honour God or create idolize our resources.

Invite God's Spirit to bring to mind a resource that you are at risk of idolizing. Shape the clay into something that represents that idol.

*"Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless." 1 Samuel 13:21*

Reflect as you hold your shaped clay: How have I let the things I hold be idols? How does this damage my relationship with God?

As an act of obedience, smash the clay idol

### *- Prayer -*

*God, you are my only hope.*

*Sometimes, though, I put my hope in other things.*

*Help me to notice when I'm doing that, and give me grace to turn back to you quickly.*

*You are my only God.*



### *Focus Verse: Psalm 147:2-3*

Visual reminders are something I use alot, especially to remind me to pray for people. Sometimes I write the initials of a few loved ones on my hand, and pray for them throughout the day as I see the writing on my hand. A bandaid is kind of a secret, prophetic reminder between you and God: only you and He know that you're wearing it on behalf of someone else, and it serves as a great prayer reminder.

### *Supplies Needed*

Band aids, perhaps in fun designs and patterns so people can choose.

### *Questions for Discussion or Journalling -*

- \* Do you find it easy or difficult to pray for others?
- \* Does having a visual reminder, such as the bandage, help remind you to pray?
- \* How might God be inviting you to pray for others throughout your day?



How often do we notice that the people around us are living with wounds by the way they act and interact with the world around them - emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual. The wounds take on many forms and expressions. Let the Holy Spirit bring to mind someone you know who is wounded.

*Lord, I lift up to you my friend. They may not know how to come to you right now for healing, but just as the four friends in Mark 2 carried their friend to you who was paralyzed, so I carry this person to You.*

Take a bandaid from the box, and stick it on your hand or arm where it is visible to you.

*"The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem and bringing the exiles back to Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, binding up their wounds." - Psalm 147:2&3*

### *- Prayer -*

*Lord, thank you that you are binding up my friend's wounds.  
Thank you that you are the Healer, touching hearts and bodies, and making whole.  
Each time I see this bandaid, remind me to stand, believing for my friend's healing.*