

Prayer Guide 2020

National Weekend of Prayer for Faith, Hope and Life

Overview

This Prayer Guide will help faith leaders prepare to lead public prayers (or readings) for the National Weekend of Prayer for Faith, Hope, & Life. The goal of these prayers is to bring support and healing to those affected by:

- > Psychological or emotional pain,
- > Suicidal thoughts,
- > A suicide attempt, or
- > The loss of a loved one by suicide.

Thoughtfully composed prayers can strengthen faith, which brings hope and a pathway toward a fuller life.

Conversely, if words are not chosen carefully, great harm can be done to community members who have been touched by suicide. Therefore, we encourage faith leaders to follow this guide **very closely**. By following this guide, a faith leader addresses the issues directly and honestly, while also lessening the chances of unintentionally increasing the pain of individuals who are currently feeling alone in intense darkness, are at risk for self-harm, or who have recently experienced a suicide-related tragedy.

Judgmental attitudes and hurtful comments, even if unintended, often cause survivors of a suicide or suicide attempt to leave the faith community they were attending. **Non-judgmental caring is essential.**

Three Elements for a Public Prayer

An effective prayer for Faith, Hope, & Life should include each of these elements and only these elements:

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- 1. The pain is real.** Acknowledge that some in the faith community are in deep emotional or psychological pain. This pain could be from:
- a. hopelessness, mental illness (depression, anxiety, bipolar, schizophrenia, etc.), trauma—either recent or in childhood, lacking reasons for living, social isolation, meaningless, or thoughts of suicide;
 - b. the difficulty of caring for someone experiencing this pain; or
 - c. the loss of someone who died by suicide.



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- 2. You are not alone.** Emphasize that those experiencing emotional or psychological pain are not alone. This type of pain is common, even among people of deep faith, yet too often we do not acknowledge that fact. At any given time, there may be many in the community experiencing deep and seemingly unbearable pain. Those in pain are surrounded by individuals in the (faith) community who care for them deeply, although, sometimes those who care do not know how to express



their love and support. In addition to assurances that members of the community are there for support, focus on the comfort offered through the eternal presence of their deity (as expressed in your faith tradition).

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- 3. There is hope.** Life sustaining hope can be found through faith, through the comfort and support of others, and through the effective treatment of mental, psychological, and emotional problems. Cite any of the many examples from scripture of individuals who persevered through the darkest of times to experience a life rich in peace and fulfillment.



Including these three elements in a prayer (or reading) brings comfort on many levels: spiritual, emotional, psychological, and even physical. Also, by **adhering closely** to this guide, faith leaders can avoid saying things that may be offensive, shaming, or unnecessarily painful. (Click on these links for important resources to learn about how to speak **Safely** about suicide and about what to **Avoid Saying**.)

The Don'ts—What to avoid in public comments and prayers

- > **Don't reinforce negative stereotypes, myths, or stigma related to mental illnesses or suicidal persons.** Examples: adjectives like “successful” suicide, “unsuccessful” suicide, and “failed attempt;” terms such as “committed suicide” (can reinforce stigmatizing attitudes about people who die by suicide).
- > **Don't present suicide as common or acceptable. Don't imply that suicidal behavior is what most people do in a given circumstance.** The vast majority of people who face adversity, mental illness, and other challenges do not die by suicide, but instead find support, treatment, or other ways to cope.
- > **Don't attribute suicide to a single cause or circumstance. Avoid portraying suicide as having no cause.** Suicides result from a complex interplay of factors.
- > **Don't use data describing suicide as an “epidemic” or language that suggests suicide is inevitable or unsolvable.** Under the right circumstances, many suicides are preventable.

For further explanation and details, click [here](#).

Examples

We know faith leaders do not want to hurt those who have been touched in any way by suicide or mental illness. To minimize potential harm, we have created prayers for you to use, either as they are or with minor modifications to put them into your “own voice.” These samples represent the perspectives of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Jewish

A Prayer to My Creator.

In our holy words of the bible we read the story of Elijah. We know that he was ready to give up. As we read, “He left his servant there and he went a day’s journey into the wilderness by himself. He came and sat down under a broom-tree; and he asked to die; he said: ‘It is enough; now God, take away my life.’”

God, you gave strength to Elijah in his time of need. You showed him a way out of his struggles. In these times, the darkness threatens to suffocate me, I am scared and alone, I feel no one’s presence, much less

yours. Please help me see the light. Help me to see the light in my own life. Help me to know that the darkness will pass.

I know that this life has value. I know that my life is meaningful. Help me to remember that today and every day. Help me to transcend myself and make this world a better place. I will be the light for others and spread my light to all.

I pray for strength, I pray for companionship, and I pray to be able to see the light.

Amen

*~Contributed by Rabbi Ben Goldstein,
Temple Aliyah, Woodland Hills, CA*



Christian

We are gathered here today in worship and prayer to thank you for the gift of life in all of its splendor and its sorrow. Even in our darkest moments, we are grateful for this gracious gift.

But in our celebration of life, we pause to acknowledge that some among us have suffered greatly from the loss of a loved one to suicide. They are crushed with grief, wondering if anything will ever make sense again – if they will ever heal and recover from the devastation of their loss.

There are also some among us who find themselves on the edge of despair, either too numb to feel much of anything or full of anxious, dark thoughts of ending their life. Hope has begun to fade and they are holding on by a thread.

God, in these moments, may we remember that we are never alone – not even for a single moment. Thank you for your promise to never abandon us or forsake us, and for the security of your dear presence ever within us. Thank you for the promise that nothing can separate us from your love found in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Thank you, also, for the reassurance that we don't have to walk this pilgrim path by ourselves; thank you for the sacred companions on the journey—brothers and sisters who are willing to listen to us, cry with us, pray with us, hold us, stand with

us in our loneliness, be Jesus-in-the-flesh reminders of your nearness to us, and especially for those who have faith for us when our own faith falters. Thank you, too, for healers in the medical and mental health field with their special expertise and care.

For those who need a fresh infusion of hope, may our time here together today provide that hope - hope to hold on, praying expectantly for better days ahead, for the return of joy, and the release of sorrow.

May those of us not currently experiencing grief or loss respond to our aching brothers and sisters in pain with tender compassion, so that we will be able to say together "Where there is faith, there is hope; where there is hope, there is LIFE."

In Jesus' name, Amen

*~Contributed by Kay Warren,
Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA*



Father God,

Your Word tells us of your nature: all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present, the author and perfecter of all good things. We rest in your nature. Your perfection as a loving Father is the source of our great security.

Yet, your ways are mysterious. As your sons and daughters, we often feel hopeless and perplexed.

We see evil that seems to triumph, suffering that challenges hope, loss and pain that leaves us, your children, asking... why? *Why God?*

Your Word tells us this question is not unique to us, because your people through time have asked you, "Why?"

Indeed, Your Word tells us that your people saw similar oppression, experienced heartache, bore the weight of similar suffering and endured struggles so deep that your servant Paul said he *"despaired of life itself."*(1) And your prophet Elijah was under such pressure that he spoke to you, saying, *"Father, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*(2).

We, your children, live as these did in the past. We live in this mystery; we suffer with mental and emotional anguish; and cry out to you.

Thank you that you hear your people's cries of pain. You know their pain is real. Thank you that your people who suffer now are not alone.

You promised to never leave us or forsake us. Thank you that you call your people to be lovingly present with compassion for those who may be despairing, with thoughts of death, or even thoughts of suicide because of their great despair.

Give us willing hearts to walk with those who are hurting to be lights in the darkness and helping hands on the journey.

And especially to those who may have lost loved ones to suicide, let us be givers of the kinds of comfort that you inspire, so these of the family of faith can find hope for today, and for the future, as well.

Help us in this great endeavor that all may find their hope in you.

For your great name's sake,

Amen

(1) 2 Corinthians 1:8 (2) 1 Kings 19:4

*~Contributed by Rev. Glen Bloomstrom,
Retired Army Chaplain,
LivingWorks Education*

Muslim

Thank you, God, Light of the Heavens and Earth, for all your bounties, seen and unseen. In this time of difficulty, we turn to you for guidance and hope. As we worship, celebrate and praise You, we want to acknowledge that the light in many hearts has turned into darkness because of the crushing burden of pain, despair and hopelessness. Some are suffering from the devastating agony of having lost loved ones to suicide. The anguish is real and unbearable. Please help us. We yearn for guidance and comfort.

We take refuge in the Qur'an which tells us to have faith and be continuously conscious of God, especially in times of affliction. When the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), early in his ministry, felt deeply despondent, bewildered and forsaken by God for three long years, a revelation burst forth: "By the glorious morning light and by the night when it is still, your Sustainer has not forgotten you, nor is He displeased. And, truly, that which comes after will be better for you than the present. Verily, your Sustainer will soon give you so amply that you will be well-pleased." (Qur'an 93:1-5) In another passage, the holy book emphasizes: "So truly, with every difficulty comes ease; so truly, with every difficulty comes ease. So when you are free from your task, continue to strive and to your Sustainer turn with loving attention."

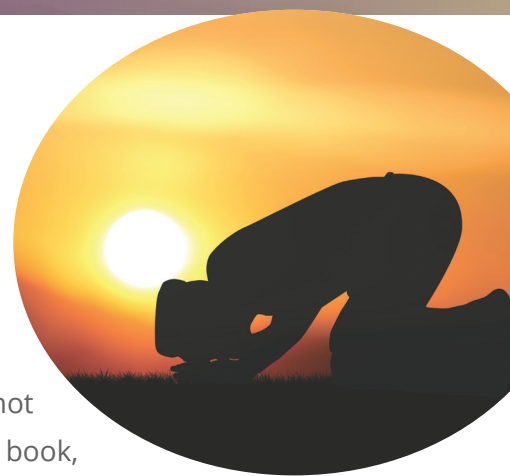
(Qur'an 94:5-8) To deepen faith and hope, the Qur'an asks us to meditate on nature. Have you not noticed, says the holy book, that, when the earth was parched and lifeless, the waters of Mercy descended and the earth became clothed in green? "He is the One who sends down rain after they have lost all hope and unfolds His Grace." (Quran 42:28)

Dear heart, never lose hope. The wise assure us that miracles dwell in the invisible. In times of utter hopelessness, may we continue as best we can with spiritual practices and righteous deeds. At some point, God will inevitably "send a stretcher from Grace."

Miracles also dwell in the visible. There are human angels all around us who yearn to be of service- to be a "lamp, lifeboat or ladder"- to those in need. May we be blessed by the presence of these beautiful people. May we bask in the care and love of these extraordinary beings. May we, in the words of spiritual teachers, "come out of the circle of time and enter the circle of love."

Thank you, beloved Sustainer. Amen.

~Contributed by Imam Jamal Rahman





Other samples

Several other sample prayers that include similar themes are offered [here](#). Although they do not follow the guide's three elements for the National Weekend of Prayer, per se, they may contain ideas or phrases that will help faith leaders plan for other occasions. These samples may be adopted or adapted as suits the needs of each faith community.



The *Faith.Hope.Life.* campaign is an initiative of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.