

Let everything that has  
breath praise the LORD.

~ Psalm 150:6



## A Seven Week Journey of W.O.R.S.H.I.P. and Spiritual Practices

Heritage Presbyterian Church  
Muskego, WI

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### **W.O.R.S.H.I.P.<sup>1</sup>**

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For the next seven weeks, we will consider our relationship with God and the world through W.O.R.S.H.I.P. As we look at the many aspects of our worship and how it impacts the varied parts of our lives: not just our life of faith, but our life as a whole.

Guiding us is the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. In her book, Calhoun describes spiritual practices that are meant to transform us. While some include the traditional disciplines such as fasting and silence, she also includes practices such as gratitude, detachment, encouragement, and truth telling. Calhoun has organized her book around the acronym W.O.R.S.H.I.P.:

#### **Worship**

**Open myself to God**

**Relinquish the false self and idols of my heart**

**Share my life with others**

**Hear the Word of God**

**Incarnate the love of Christ**

**Pray**

As we spend a week on each one of these, we will also learn spiritual practices that can help us live into our W.O.R.S.H.I.P. You are invited to choose one that resonates and comes naturally for you – or the one that seems the most challenging. Alternatively, you may choose a different practice for each day of the week to discover which is most meaningful to you. Each spiritual practice includes questions for reflection and ways respond. In addition to our individual spiritual practice, there are also opportunities for mid-week gatherings (see back page).

I look forward to exploring W.O.R.S.H.I.P. with you over the next seven weeks as well as talking with you if are looking for more ideas or exercises, discussion on your reflections, or have other thoughts about a life of worship.

Journeying together,  
Pastor Michelle

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<sup>1</sup> Guided by *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (*The Handbook*).

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## Worship

October 1 – John 4:4-42 (CEB)

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*“Humans cannot help but assign ultimate value and worth to someone or something... Ultimately what we are devoted to will shape our lives.” - Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*

*Disciplines: Celebration, Gratitude, Worship*

Worship takes many forms. We most often refer to it as the hour we spend together on Sunday mornings. But worship is intended to be a way of life and the primary form of our discipleship. Jesus said that true worshippers worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23). We know that worshipping in spirit and truth doesn't require us to be in a certain place at a certain time. As we go through this week, consider what it means for you to worship in spirit and truth.



*God, I desire to worship you in spirit and truth even though I don't fully understand what that means. Guide me as I seek you using new spiritual practices – that I would not only honor you but also come to know you in a new way. Amen.*



The spiritual practice of **Celebration** is about finding joy in God and the entirety of God's creation. One way to live this practice is to seek and ponder those things that bring you deep gladness. What makes it an element of worship is bringing that gladness before God.

Reflect: What brings you deep gladness – not just happiness, but a profound sense of contentment and joy? These might be activities, locations, and relationships, etc.

In these times, are you aware of God's presence? If not, how might you invite God into these moments to share your joy?

Respond: Identify a place you most readily connect with God. Is it in nature? Listening to Christian [or other] music? Participating in corporate worship? Solitude? Go to that place. What do you want to tell God about the joy you receive there?<sup>2</sup>

Joy increases when it is shared. Each day this week, share a moment of joy you experienced that day with someone else – and ask them to share a joy with you.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Handbook*, 30.

Celebration is closely tied to the practice of **Gratitude**. Gratitude is a practice of worship because it brings us into the presence of God as we give thanks for who God is and what God does. The practice of gratitude often leads to joy.

Reflect: For what are you grateful – and what are you *not* grateful for? For the things you are not grateful for (i.e., illness, broken relationship, fears), has God brought anything good from them for which you can be thankful?

How often do you express gratitude each day? What does this expression of gratitude look like: words, actions, song, ...? Towards who or what is it expressed?

Respond: Get a current hardship in mind. How do you feel about this hardship? Tell the truth to God. Where is there evidence of God's presence in this hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for? If you cannot find God in your hardship, spend some time with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What does God want to tell you?<sup>3</sup>

Keep track of things you are thankful for this week, big and small. On Sunday, review them as you prepare to worship. An app that is useful for this and also allows you to document location and pictures is [Day One](http://dayoneapp.com/about/).<sup>4</sup>

We often use *worship* as loosely as we use *love* while at the same time squirreling it away into an hour on Sunday. The spiritual practice of **Worship** isn't about church attendance but an attitude that invites God to be present in every part of our life. Worship includes praise and celebration as well as obedience.

Reflect: As you reflect on our Sunday morning corporate worship, does it impact your daily life? If so, how?

How do you see the connection between worship and thanksgiving and stewardship of God's gifts?

Respond: Think of a time you have been deeply moved in worship. What was happening in your life at that time? What was going on in worship? Put yourself in places where you most easily connect with God in worship.<sup>5</sup>

One way to worship is through the names we use for God. As you look at a sampling of God's name as we find it in Scripture, which are most important to you? Which do you struggle with (or even reject)? This week, use different names for God as you pray.

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*The Handbook*, 33.  
<http://dayoneapp.com/about/>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Handbook*, 51.

Abba	JEHOVAH (YHWH)
Faithful and True	King of glory
God full of compassion	Lord God omnipotent
God my maker	Master
God of all comfort	My beloved
God of all grace	My exceeding joy
God of heaven and earth	My Father
God of hope	My fortress
God of my life	My friend
God of my praise	My glory
God of my righteousness	My hiding place and my shield
God of our salvation	My portion forever
God of patience and consolation	My praise
God of peace	My Redeemer
God the Judge of all	Refuge from the storm
God who raises the dead	Rock of my salvation
Great shepherd of the sheep	Spirit of counsel and might
God that calls you	Spirit of life
God that is mighty	Spirit of wisdom and understanding
God that keeps thee	The Amen
God that ponders the heart	The LORD that heals thee
God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit	The LORD that smites
God who divided the Red Sea	The resurrection, and the life
Horn of my salvation	The True Vine
I AM	The Word
Immanuel [God with us]	Wonderful

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## Open Myself to God

October 8 – Mark 6:30-32 (CEB)

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*“Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential, a capacity for birth.” – Gerald May*

*Disciplines: Examen, Practicing the Presence, Rest*

Opening ourselves to God always begins with time. Without setting apart time from our daily routine and the unexpected things that always seem to come up, God remains only an acquaintance. Jesus routinely found time to pray or spend time in the presence of God, and he taught his disciples to do so as well. God not only created Sabbath for humankind, but also created the construct of time for us. In what ways do you steward your time as part of your worship of God?



*Ever present God, I think about spending time with you but my days seem so full. Sometimes it's not finding the time but finding the desire. I wonder what it is I should be doing. Teach me to open myself to you so that I may abide more deeply in your presence. Amen.*



The practice of **Examen** is a way for us to take time to review our day and consider where God was and was not present. Regular use of Examen helps in identifying patterns of God's activity in our life allowing us to better discern God's will. Although the practice of Examen is usually performed at the end of the day, it also easily practiced around the dinner table in the evening.

Reflect: In what ways do you prepare for the day by reviewing your schedule? In what ways do you evaluate your day by reviewing your conversations, actions, and appointments?

How do you become aware of how God has been present in your days? How do you discern for trends and themes to help guide you?

Respond: Light a candle and become still in the presence of Christ. Place your hand on your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the moment of the day you are most grateful for. When were you most able to give and receive love? Talk to God about what is was like for you to be in that moment. What made it important to you? Breathe in your gratitude to God. Journal your gratitude to God. What you have learned about yourself in this?<sup>6</sup>

Try a "reverse Examen" by setting aside time in the morning to review your day. Think about the things you will do and the conversations you will have. Bring them before God as you set an intention for the day.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Handbook*, 60.

**Practicing the Presence** is often attributed to Brother Lawrence<sup>7</sup> who [wrote and spoke](#) about coming into God's presence in even the most mundane tasks. Practicing the presence isn't about formal prayer but doing everything with mindset that God is with you in it – our constant companion. When one has practiced the presence for a while, it is common to be in a running conversation with God throughout the day.

Reflect: How do you currently bring God's presence into your everyday?

What of your activities most glorify God? How do you know? Does God care about the mundane activities like washing the dishes or changing the oil? Why or why not?

Respond: Mundane, daily tasks in monasteries were not just for humility or even sustainability – they were opportunities to include God in the daily rhythm of life. Take a task from your daily life and dedicate it to God. While performing the task, pray, listen to hymns or other Christian music, give thanks for the person/people you are performing the task for, or offer breath prayer (see week for **Prayer**).

Decide to stop several times throughout your day to pay attention to God and God's presence. Set a clock to remind you. Spend five minutes [or even just one] reading Scripture, praying, or just being with Jesus. What is this like for you?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.pathsoflove.com/pdf/Practice-of-the-Presence-of-God.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> *The Handbook*, 73. Note: One way I used to do this when I worked in the corporate world was by putting a reminder or appointment in

In a world focused on production and acquisition, **Rest** is not a practice with which many of us are familiar. Rest is something we do when we are sick or maybe at night when we go to bed. Rest is not mere idleness nor does it require lack of movement. Rather, rest is a form of Sabbath-keeping; a way of honoring God.

Reflect: Jesus said that Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). What does it mean to you that God created Sabbath for you?

When you think of time, is there a spaciousness to it or is it scarce?

Respond: Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, then do something you delight in: go for a walk, take a nap, talk to friend, have a cup of coffee, play a game. Enjoy yourself in God. Receive the gift of rest. Tell God what happens in you as you try to rest.<sup>9</sup>

Say “no” to something this week not because you don’t want to do it or don’t have the time, but because you *choose* to allow time for rest in your life. Then, place an appointment or reminder in your calendar when you were to do what was asked and spend a few moments reflecting on Matthew 11:28-30.<sup>10</sup>

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my electronic calendar that brought forth a Bible verse. This aided in memorization and brought my focus back to God through the day.

<sup>9</sup> *The Handbook*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (NRSV)

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## *Relinquish the False Self and Idols of My Heart*

October 15 – Luke 4:1-13 (NRSV)

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*“Things that can be here today and gone tomorrow provide a precarious mooring for the soul. Our truest identity can never be something we accomplish, earn, or prove on our own. It is a gift we receive from Jesus.” – Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*

*Disciplines: Detachment, Mindfulness/Attentiveness, Submission*

Just as confession (and forgiveness!) are part of our corporate worship, so it is a part of our life of worship. This week’s focus isn’t on ceasing an activity opposed to God’s Kingdom and God’s righteousness (Matthew 5:33) but on the things we seek before God. Some of these are good things – like family – but when we place our family as a priority and devotion before God, they become an idol of our heart. Likewise, it isn’t money or financial security the Bible says is wrong but the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10).



*Spirit of wisdom and understanding, I work hard to hide my true self or the idols of my heart. I want people to only believe the best of me, sometimes becoming my own idol. Covered by your grace, show me what I hold onto and value more than you. Teach me to trust and rest in your love and provision. Amen.*



Christian **Detachment** is sometimes seen as acting as if this world doesn't matter. But Jesus healed and fed those he taught and saved, so there is no reason to believe that the joys and sufferings of this world aren't real and meaningful to God. The practice of detachment isn't forgoing the world but one of letting go of the things of this world that we value more than God.

**Reflect:** What part of your outward identity do you hold onto most tightly? Is it a false identity or a true identity? What truth are you afraid of letting people see?

Review your calendar and your checkbook (or credit card statement). Where do you spend your time and your money? Would it make you uncomfortable to disclose it to someone else?

**Respond:** Practice letting go by giving away something you are attached to (money, time, possessions). Notice the feelings that arise in you when you think of giving something away. Spend time talking to God about how attached you are to your things.<sup>11</sup>

Worldly honors can be a major hindrance in the spiritual life, and we are encouraged to fly from them. Look for ways you can avoid being honored this week, and in genuine humility seek to deflect any praise you receive to the God from whom all blessings flow.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *The Handbook*, 107.

<sup>12</sup> *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*, edited by Foster, Richard J. and Smith, James Bryan, (*Devotional Classics*), 134.

**Mindfulness/Attentiveness** is all the rage right now. While it's most often associated with eastern traditions like meditation and yoga, mindfulness is about being present. It might include acknowledging the presence of God but just as important is the practice of living in real time with the people or circumstances before you. Mindfulness includes taking a moment to "take a picture" in your memory. This practice is also about being attentive to the present rather than allowing your focus to move back into the past or towards the future.

**Reflect:** Consider the distractions in your day. Where do they draw your mind and attention? Do they energize you or cause you to worry? When was the last time you felt content?

How aware are you of your body? Do you notice when you clench your jaw, scowl, or create tension in your neck?

**Respond:** When you sense you are having a reaction larger than a situation warrants, take some deep breaths and ask for awareness to let go of anything but God. How does letting go make you feel? What do you want to say to God about that?<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the day bring your attention to what is happening in that moment. In conversations, focus on listening rather than what you will say next. During meals, concentrate on the smell, touch, and experience of eating. Look at what is happening around you, acknowledging the sounds you hear, the images and colors you see, and how you feel. If it's difficult to remember to do this, set a reminder on your phone.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Handbook*, 117.

Being a person of integrity requires one to stand their ground for what they believe, and giving into someone is often seen as weakness. These are some reasons the spiritual practice of **Submission** is often seen negatively. But Jesus taught us to pray “Thy will be done,” and prayed this same prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Submission is a practice of being a good follower, being teachable, and the willingness to accept correction. The submission Jesus teaches requires integrity and strength as we seek to be obedient to God.

Reflect: What are times you have submitted to the will of another? How did this make you feel? How was it a strong choice?

What does it mean for you to submit to God’s will? What must you give up to do so? What might you gain?

Respond: As you go about your tasks this week, deliberately pause to listen for God’s counsel, and attempt to line up your actions with God’s will as often as you think of it.<sup>14</sup>

Try driving the speed limit this week. To avoid frustration, make sure you allow enough time to get where you need to go. How does it feel to submit yourself to the authority of our speed limit laws even when no one else does it? What benefits did you receive?

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<sup>14</sup> *Devotional Classics*, 107.

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## Share My Life with Others

October 22 – Hebrews 13:2 (NRSV)

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*“We will never really serve others unless we see that the needs of our neighbors are as real and as important as our own.... Service is rooted in seeing – in seeing others as God does.” – Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*

*Disciplines: Hospitality, Service, Witness*

Sharing our life with others is how we live out the communion we know in Jesus Christ. In a way, it is a form of stewardship of our time, gifts, and abilities. Sharing our life with others is also how we continue the incarnate presence of Jesus in the world. While our sharing may take many forms, we look to Jesus to see how it is we are to love one another. As we share our lives, we are able to welcome one another as Christ welcomed us. (Romans 15:7).



*Jesus, in the impossibility of loving as you loved, we sometimes choose to withhold ourselves from others. Because we can’t solve homelessness, we don’t even serve a meal. Because we can’t cure cancer, we don’t visit the sick. Because we can’t feed every starving child, we don’t give generously. Teach us the better way so that we may see others with your eyes leading us to love and serve those you place in our lives. Amen.*





The spiritual practice of **Hospitality** is ancient – we find it in our earliest Scriptures. Of our Sacraments, Baptism is an invitation to be included and loved, and the Lord’s Supper is an invitation to be welcomed and fed. Hospitality is not being the “hostess with the mostess” but rather a way of sharing ourselves in a way that welcomes and values others.

Reflect: With whom do you keep company? Who have you invited (or not invited) to your home? Have you invited people to your home when it was a mess?

Consider times when you have been the host, whether in your home or otherwise. What was your primary focus: food, image, praise, comfort, ...? In what ways did you seek out someone on the periphery to invite them in?

Respond: Invite someone over to your house without completely cleaning it or picking everything up. Reflect on any anxiety (or even shame) you might feel. Also reflect on who you chose to invite over. Did they comment on the mess? Did you feel more or less comfortable during the visit? Why or why not?

Develop a list of standard conversational questions (other than, “What do you do?”) that can open people up to one another. How do the questions you ask bring welcome rather than comparison?<sup>15</sup>

The mission of the Church is to love and serve, which is why we call these ministries *mission*. We serve for many reasons: because Jesus said we should; as an act of thanksgiving for what God has done for us; because it’s what good people do; out love and compassion for others. The spiritual practice of **Service** allows us to share ourselves with others in a way that opens us to experience Christ in them and with them – and this can be true of whatever reason we choose to serve. While the giving of our money is a spiritual discipline as well, in service we also give our time and talents.

Reflect: Why do you serve where and how you do? Do your motivations change depending on the situation? Have they changed or stayed the same over the years?

Review your charitable giving over the last year or two. Next to the amounts, note how much time you spent related to these causes, the names of people you served with, and the you met. What are their stories?

Respond: Make a commitment to participate in an act of service through the community or the church in the next month. To help you follow through on the commitment, actually sign up or email the organizer this week.

Ask those who know you to give you their take on what your spiritual gifts are. Plan a way of using your gifts to benefit others in the next month.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *The Handbook*, 163.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Handbook*, 169.

When we hear the word **Witness**, we may think of a courtroom – or the Jehovah’s Witness that comes to our door. When it comes to witnessing about our faith in Jesus, we often get knots in our stomach or a sudden urge to be anywhere else. The spiritual practice of witness isn’t about forcing the Good News on others or defending every Christian doctrine. Instead, we are called to understand how God has been at work in our life as we help others see how God is already at work in theirs. It’s not up to us to save others: we plant seeds that will be nurtured and harvested by others or nurture what others have planted.

**Reflect:** One of the best compliments a Christian can receive is for someone to see from our life that we spend time with Jesus. As you reflect on the last week, how would people know this about you?

If someone asked you why you believe in Jesus, what would you say? Is there an experience from your life you could share rather than quoting a Bible verse?

**Respond:** Read Psalm 40:4-8 and reflect on the “wondrous deeds” and the attention God has focused on you. Recount specific occasions as you compose your own litany of God’s gracious acts.<sup>17</sup>

If asked you why you believe in Jesus, what would you say? Is there an experience from your life you could share rather than quoting a Bible verse? Take time to write down your experience of the Gospel. It doesn’t need to be long – in fact, shorter is better!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Devotional Classics*, 235.

<sup>18</sup> For an example, check out my blog post

at <http://lifeinthelabyrinth.com/2017/09/25/whats-my-gospel/>.

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## *Hear God’s Word*

*October 29 – Colossians 3:12-17  
(NRSV)*

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*“Our desire to know more, read more, and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the good.” – Richard Rohr*

*Disciplines: Bible Study, Lectio Divina, Memorization*

The Word of God was meant to be heard rather than simply read. One of the foundations of Reformed worship is that the Word be proclaimed in the hearing of the people. But *hearing* isn’t the purpose. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word *to hear* also connotes obedience – that we would hear it and put it into practice. While it may be difficult to find time to sit and read the Bible every day, we have the technology to bring the spoken Word with us on our phones and when memorized, to reflect on it wherever we are.



*Jesus the Word made flesh, if only we could walk with you as the disciples did. Not only would be in the presence of the Living Word every day but you would be able to explain it to us. Teach us to let your Word abide in us so that it would take flesh in our lives. Amen.*



There is more to the practice of **Bible Study** than simply reading the Bible. We can come to Scripture looking for an answer to a question and comfort in times of need. But we can also come to Scripture looking for beauty – possibly by focusing on the description of creation or in the beauty of a psalm. We can come to a passage seeking to enter into the scene and the dialogue – to find the person with whom we most identify. The practice of Bible Study is the practice of seeking and listening to God.<sup>19</sup>

**Reflect:** Reflect on your experiences with the Bible. Who first introduced it to you? What verses have spoken truth in your life?

What are your expectations of Scripture when you come to read or study it?

**Respond:** Experiment with different ways of listening to Scripture. Read the Bible out loud. Savor the words. Which words stand out for you? Keep these words with you all day. Or listen to the Bible on tape or CD while driving or exercising. Print a verse on a card and place it where you will see it throughout the day. Put a verse on your screen saver.<sup>20</sup>

Read a story from one of the Gospels. Think about how God was making Godself known in the person of Jesus. Reflect on what they say and hear and felt as God was living among them.<sup>21</sup>

**Lectio Divina** (pronounced lexio div-EEena) is the spiritual practice of holy reading. This may sound daunting but is a very accessible way of reading and meditating on Scripture. There is no one way to do lectio divina. A simple guideline you can do on your own or with others is to read the passage out loud three times followed by periods of silence. After the first reading you share a word or phrase that touches you; after the second, share a feeling, image, or song invoked by the passage; and after the third, share what God might be inviting you to. During the process, there isn't discussion of why you say what you do and others don't respond to it. After you are done, you may enter into conversation about the experience.

**Reflect:** What are your experiences in reading and reflecting on Scripture with others?

Have you heard God inviting you to something as you read or studied Scripture?

**Respond:** Practice lectio divina three times during the week (alone or with someone else). Reflect on how you felt about the process. How did it differ from past devotional readings or study? Did you feel the presence of God differently?

Before reading Scripture, open yourself to the presence of God. Say something like "Here I am, Lord" or "Open my eyes to see wonderful things in your Word." Read slowly until a word or phrase lights up for you. When you sense a word lighting up for you, attend to this word. Do not read any further: Listen to you feeling and God's nudging around this word. Let this word summon you into prayer. Reflect on this word through the day.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A free website with multiple versions of the Bible and other aids can be found at <http://www.biblegateway.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> *The Handbook*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> *Devotional Classics*, 343.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Handbook*, 190.

After Witness, the spiritual practice that many dread is **Memorization**. Very few of us have been blessed with a photographic memory and feel that we cannot memorize Scripture. But we know we can do it (for example, how good are you at movie trivia). Memorization allows us to recall Scripture in times of praise, lament, joy, and grief. It is one way we bring the presence of God into our daily lives. The goal isn't to quote chapter and verse but to have God's Word be part of the way we experience and respond to the world.

Reflect: What Bible passages do you know? When did you learn them? How often do they come to mind?

What do you find easy to memorize? Why do you think this is? How could it help you memorize Scripture?

Respond: Memorization isn't limited to Scripture. Great hymns of the faith or more contemporary Christian music are ways to memorize God's Word. Think of a hymn or song that has moved you and commit it to memory.

Choose one Bible verse this week to memorize. Make sure it is readily available on your phone, on your mirror, on your dashboard so that it is constantly before you. Recite it in the morning when you wake up and in the evening before you go to sleep. Alternatively, choose a passage that is meaningful to you, such as Psalm 23 or the Beatitudes. Commit to learning one verse each week until you have the passage memorized.

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## *Incarnate the Love of Christ*

*November 5 – James 3:1-12 (CEB)*

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*“Love always give birth to more love.” – Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*

*Disciplines: Blessing Others/Encouragement, Control of the Tongue, Stewardship*

When I talk about the incarnation, I say that God had me at hello. Even if Jesus hadn't taught and healed and died and risen, the reality that God chose to wear humanity for 30 odd years and live and eat with us is miraculous and deserves my love, praise, and obedience. The incarnate Christ no longer walks the earth but the love of Christ is still made flesh when we choose to love as Jesus does. Imitation is the best form of flattery, so when we incarnate the love of Christ, we are offering our worship to God.



*Holy Spirit, you continue to make the presence of God real in the world and in our lives. We know we can't be Jesus, but we can be Christ-like. Teach us to bear Christ to the world by loving others through our words, actions, and presence. Amen.*



The spiritual practice of **Blessing Others** is often thought of things we do or give but is also the **Encouragement** we give others through our words. We're all wired differently: some of us find it easy to praise and compliment others, while some of us have a feeling it is sense of flattery or that if someone is just doing their job, why would praise them. There's no one right to be (hallelujah!) nor is there one right way to bless and encourage others. There is no shortage of words in the world that divide, marginalize, ridicule, and incite. This week, we will seek to decrease these words as we increase our words of blessing.

Reflect: Think back to when someone offered you the right word at the right time. How did you feel before and after? What change did it prompt?  
Is it easy for you to compliment someone?  
Why or why not?

Respond: Craft a blessing for someone you know. Ask God to lead you to a Scripture that can encourage him or her. Give the gift of this blessing in person or in written form.<sup>23</sup>

Dedicate a day to the encouragement of others by catching people doing good. It might be thanking someone in your family for putting their dishes away, noting an act of service done for you or someone else, or complimenting a good meal. At the end of the day reflect on how this made you feel and how others reacted.

Most of us have lived long enough to know that the adage "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me" just isn't true. **Control of the Tongue** is more than just biting it when you want to say something that is not kind or helpful. While abstaining from negative or angry words is part of this spiritual practice, self-control over what we say includes telling the truth and examining our critical nature.

Reflect: Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). How have your words been made "fleshy," either by building someone up or hurting them?

Reflect on what it means to tell the truth. Does it mean not lying or telling a falsehood? Does it mean not allowing a misunderstanding to continue? Does it mean volunteering information you know somebody wants or needs even if they didn't specifically ask?

Respond: Memorize Ephesians 4:29: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* (NIV). Reflect on it during the week and spend a few minutes in the evening reviewing your day and whether your words built up or tore down.

Make an effort to take a full exhale before responding to others. This will slow the conversation down but use the time to organize your thoughts, be mindful of the moment, find patience with the person you are talking to, or let go of something they just said so that your words may continue to be loving.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Handbook*, 200.

When we think of **Stewardship** we usually think of pledge cards and budgets. Money is an important part of what God calls us to steward but Psalm 24:1 tells us that *the earth is the Lord's and everything in it; the world and all who live in it*. Therefore, it's not just our money we steward to God's glory but every aspect of our life. As we practice the spiritual discipline of stewardship, let us consider the use of our minds, bodies, time, gifts, possession, and words as well as financial resources.

**Reflect:** Reflect on how your financial giving – to the church and to charities and causes – is and is not part of your worship.

Of the many resources you have, how do you steward them to God's glory? Which seem the most scarce or difficult to give away or return to God?

**Respond:** Explore tithing for a month if you do not already practice this principle. Without becoming legalistic, look for ways to curb your unnecessary spending in order to give more lavishly to the poor.<sup>24</sup>

Spend some time thinking about what it would mean if you tithed your possessions. What would it mean to use 10% of your house for God's glory (such as hosting a Bible study, mission activity, or providing a place for someone to stay)? What if you gave away 10% of your clothing (and not just the stuff you don't like or doesn't fit)? What other creative ways can you steward your possessions for God's use?

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<sup>24</sup> *Devotional Classics*, 256.

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## Prayer

November 12 – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 (NIV)

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*“Prayer is a word that describes a relationship.” – Adele Ahlberg Calhoun*

*Disciplines: Breath Prayer, Conversational Prayer, Welcoming Prayer*

One element of Christian worship most commonly brought into our everyday lives is prayer. Often, we make prayer more difficult than it needs to be by setting expectations of ourselves that it be eloquent, of a substantial length, or include specific elements. There is no one right or best way to pray. As Calhoun says, prayer is a relationship and so the only expectation and desire we need is to spend time with God.



*Holy Spirit, release me from the expectations that prayer often brings. Teach me to come to you in ordinary ways so that I might abide in your love. Let my prayer bring me to your still waters and green pastures; may I eat at the table you abundantly provide. You have already invited me to come and be with you. Let it be so. Amen.*



One of the simplest ways to pray is **Breath Prayer**, aligning our breathing with our words, usually thought rather than spoken. The most well-known breath prayer is the “Jesus” prayer: Lord Jesus Christ (on the inhale) / have mercy on me a sinner (on the exhale). However, anything short phrase or sentence can be a breath prayer:

- + Jesus / abide in me
- + My help comes from the Lord / maker of heaven and earth
- + Take my life / and let it be
- + The Lord is my shepherd / I shall not want

With ease and ability to pray this way in virtually any circumstance, the act of rhythmic and deep breathing serves to slow our heart and focus our minds. For those interested in expanding their prayer life, breath prayer is an introduction to the practice of centering prayer.

Reflect: What has been your experience with prayer? Does it come easily to you or is it daunting?

Very few people identify as being “good pray-ers.” What do you think about your prayer life and how do you feel about that?

Respond: Set aside five minutes each day to practice breath prayer. Find a quiet place and a comfortable position. If you do not want to be distracted by time, you can use a rosary or prayer cord (simply take a piece of yarn or rope and tie knots along it) and pray it a certain number of times. At the end of the week, reflect on your experience.

In times of waiting (at a check-out, red light, picking up your kids, etc.), rather than going to your phone or other distraction practice breath prayer. How has your time of waiting changed?

**Conversation Prayer** is closely related to practicing the presence and mindfulness. In conversation prayer, we simply converse with God during our day. For example, you might talk to God about students and teachers as you drive by a school, tell God about the beauty of a sunrise or sunset as you are seeing it, sharing with God a frustration as you are feeling it. In a way, conversation prayer is a way of training the voice in our head to include God in its ongoing conversation. As we pray to God in this way, we invite God into the moments and rhythm of our life. The practice of personal conversation prayer can also help us gain more confidence to pray out loud with others.

Reflect: How is prayer part of your relationship with God?

Does praying feel like a conversation? Why or why not?

Respond: As you are driving this week, talk to God about what you see or where you are about to go. You can even talk out loud because people will just think you are singing to the radio. How does this change the time you spend in the car? What are you alerted to or become aware of from this practice?

Consider inviting someone else to be part of your conversation prayer by taking a walk together and lifting people and places in prayer as you walk. Take time to also reflect together on the practice and what you liked or didn't like about the experience.

“Knock and the door will be opened for you.” (Matthew 7:7) In this promise of welcome, Jesus invites us to relationship. In the spirit of hospitality, we can offer Jesus the same welcome. The spiritual practice of **Welcoming Prayer** is inviting Jesus into the difficult situations of our life. When we are driven by a need to be loved, praised, controlling, accepted or are overcome with frustration, we can welcome Jesus into these circumstances. As we pray these simple prayers of welcome, we seek to relax our body as we welcome Jesus into our lives. Examples are:

- + Jesus, I let go of my need to be safe and secure. Welcome.
- + Jesus, I let go of my need to be accepted and approved of. Welcome.
- + Jesus, I let go of my need to control this person or event. Welcome.

Reflect: When you pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven,” what are you inviting God to do?

Reflect on a circumstance or relationship that causes you stress. What do you tend to focus on? How does your focus manifest itself in your emotional and physical state?

Respond: In the morning, anticipate the day’s events and what will be good or hard. Welcome Jesus into these events before you enter your day and in the midst of your day.<sup>25</sup>

This week make a point to notice when you are triggered by a person or event. Invite Jesus into the event with the words “Welcome, Jesus, welcome.”<sup>26</sup>

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**Midweek W.O.R.S.H.I.P.  
Gatherings**

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October 3 7:00 pm	Worship using Visio Divina (holy seeing)	Olive Wood Theater
October 10 7:00 pm	Contemplative worship on Psalm 46:10	Poplar Lifestyle Room
October 17 7:00 pm	Worship service of release and confession	Olive Wood Theater
October 24 7:00 pm	Conversation on identifying our spiritual gifts	Health Center Conference Room
October 31 7:00 pm	Guided meditation	Poplar Lifestyle Room
November 7 7:00 pm	Conversation on living an incarnate life	Health Center Conference Room
November 14 7:00 pm	Labyrinth walk	Olive Wood Theater

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<sup>25</sup> *The Handbook*, 289.

<sup>26</sup> *The Handbook*, 289.