

Last Sunday we had a beautiful All Saints’ Day Service. One of the most meaningful moments for me was when we had communion and shared in the Lord’s prayer together. Praying the Lord’s Prayer is an embodied action of our faith. When we say the Lord’s prayer we are comforted, we are encouraged, we remember who God is, and we are sustained.

Teaching this prayer to the disciples was a gift from Jesus to us. Anytime we find ourselves stressed out, anxious, grieving, or unsure where to turn the Lord’s Prayer centers us and reminds us that God is working through us at this moment in time.

As we continue in the fifth week of our “Gratitude Sermon Series” we will continue to explore the gifts of embodied spiritual disciplines in our lives.

Spiritual disciplines are not a new fad in the Christian community. They have been around for thousands of years as the people of God strive to embody their faith.

Just as we create the muscle memory to walk and ride a bike, we must engage in this same spiritual muscle memory so that practicing our faith becomes a natural and embodied practice.

We see that the Israelites participated in these embodied practices in Deuteronomy 6. At that time, the Israelites took God’s word literally. They affixed scripture near their heart and their heads so that they would understand God’s law and respond in faith through their heart.

Even today Jewish people wear the tefillin, these boxes of scripture tied around their head and arms, when they pray each morning.

The Israelites also had another embodied practice that they participated in each day. Following Deuteronomy 6, each family would make a mezuzah, which was a decorative box containing scripture from Deuteronomy 6. They would affix this box to the doorpost of their homes to fulfill the biblical commandment to “write the words of God on the gates and doorposts of your house” (Duet 6:9)

Each time they walked into their homes, they would be reminded of God’s presence in their lives and give thanks. These beautiful, embodied practices of faith helped the Israelites keep God’s commandments. They remind us of the importance of continuing embodied spiritual practices in our lives.

Now I do not have a mezuzah in my home, but I do have a sign over my kitchen door that reads: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” from Joshua 24.

I imagine you may have something like this in your house...a possession that reminds you of your spiritual home. It may be your family Bible, or maybe it is a picture, but I believe these things help us to continue to embody our faith.

We as Methodists, come from a tradition of embodied spiritual practices. In fact, the orders of daily praise and prayer found in our United Methodist hymnal call us to an ordered life of prayer. Through these practices we can thank God in the morning, and in the evening. This is how we should order our days so that they begin and end with giving thanks to God.

The opening to the morning prayer is: “O Lord, open our lips. And we shall declare your praise.”<sup>1</sup> The ending to the evening prayer is: “The grace of Jesus Christ enfold you this night. Go in peace.”<sup>2</sup> Can you imagine how your day might go if you began and ended like this?

Perhaps this is why we continue the tradition of praying before all our meals, taking a moment to thank God before we continue the busyness of the day. Having these intentional practices throughout the course of our days help us remain focused on God.

During the month of November there is a secular tradition that I think has some spiritual implications. Each day in November many people write one thing that they are thankful for on their social media platform. Sometimes these posts are long and sometimes they are one word, but they are always uplifting.

I wonder what it would look like for all of us to recount at least one thing a day that we are thankful for. The world would be a better place wouldn't it?

What are the things in your life that you intentionally practice? Is it your coffee in the morning, a special call to a loved one, a visit that you make each week, or going on a walk outside? We all have our routines and habits that we do each day.

What would it look like if we were more intentional about shaping our day by giving thanks to God? What would it look like if our morning and evenings began by giving thanks to God? Our lives would be transformed.

We are like the disciples in Matthew 6. We so desperately want to follow Christ, but we need God's help to do so. In this Scripture Jesus gives the disciples a model for prayer.

He teaches them how to pray the Lord's prayer the very same prayer that we pray each Sunday.

In this important prayer we acknowledge God as our Father, we ask for God’s kingdom to be realized now. We ask for God’s will to be done in our lives. We ask for God’s provision and God’s forgiveness. We ask for God to rescue us from sin. In this all-encompassing prayer, God reminds us that God is in charge and we are not.

The Lord’s prayer has been a great blessing to me. I remember as a little girl when I could not fall asleep, I would recite the Lord’s prayer until I peacefully drifted off to sleep. Praying this prayer together every Sunday does something to us. It becomes a part of us and permeates through the busyness of our lives straight into our hearts.

We pray this prayer every Sunday so that we can remember who God is and who we are and so that we can intentionally practice our faith just as the Israelites and Jesus’ disciples.

Our faith is meant to be embodied. I have always had so much admiration for our Bishops and their commitment to embodied prayer. Bishop Cho would spend a couple hours in prayer every morning and our current Bishop, Sharma Lewis, has whole prayer room set up in her home.

Do you have a designated place that you like to pray? It is in a particular room in your home? It is in your car or even outside?

When I pray, I often like to light a candle, usually as my desk downstairs where it is quiet. This sets the tone for my time of prayer that Christ is the light of the world.

In our discipleship we are all called to be intentional about our prayer lives. As we continue in this time of gratitude may we all be intentional each day about giving thanks to God.

You know that thanking God is not only good for our spiritual souls, but our physical bodies? In her book, “Grateful,” Diana Butler Bass shares: “Several scientific studies have shown that people who practice gratitude right before bedtime sleep better, more soundly, and more deeply.”<sup>3</sup>

Another way that we can give thanks to God as an intentional spiritual practice is through music. Even though we are not able to sing in church I encourage you to listen to your favorite hymns and sing them at home.

Even saying a simple: “Alleluia” means praise God.

Set some time aside each day to pray, to worship, and to give thanks to God and by doing this you will be transformed.

Something amazing happens to us when we do embodied spiritual practices. God penetrates our hearts, and our will becomes more attuned to the will of God. The founder of our denomination had this same experience.

There was a period in John Wesley’s life where he believed in his mind about salvation through his faith in Christ, but in his heart, he did not believe he was saved.

At that time, he was a pastor. He had a serious internal battle going on. How was he supposed to preach to the masses if he did not feel like he himself had been saved? His friend Peter Bohler gave him some great advice he said: “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.”<sup>4</sup>

Even when we may not feel like praying or giving thanks to God, God will use these moments to transform us. This is why we must continue to be intentional about the spiritual disciplines in our lives, because it is the way God continues to transform us as we are sent forth to serve.

**The good news for our lives today is that God has commanded us to shape our lives around giving thanks to God our Creator.** These practices change us. They help us focus on God. They help us to hear the voice of God above the voices of the world.

So if you have not yet created time in your day to begin and end with God, especially during the month of November, I invite you to do so and see how differently your days will go.

A couple of year ago I took on the Lenten practice of reading through the gospel of Luke. Luke has always been my favorite gospel because of its emphasis on saving the lost and forgiveness. Even though I have read through Luke hundreds of times now, reading this Gospel at the same time each year always brings me deep peace and further insight into God’s heart.

This scripture has become second nature to me, and its characters have become like close friends. This embodied act of faith has helped shape me personally and the way that I practice ministry.

What are the spiritual disciplines that bring you peace? What are you excited about trying next?

My hope for all of us during this season of gratitude is that this season extends into a daily practice of praise to God. May we forever be grateful for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> “The United Methodist Hymnal.” United Methodist Publishing House. Nashville, TN. 1989. P. 877.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 879.

<sup>3</sup> Diana Butler Bass. “Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks.” Harper Collins: New York, NY. 2018. P. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Journal of John Wesley: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xi.html>.

**Additional Resource**

Wesley Study Bible