



**Isaiah 55:6-11**

Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
**7** let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
**8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.  
**9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
**10** For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
**11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

**Galatians 6:7-9**

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. **8** For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. **9** And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

**Luke 8:1-8, 11-15**

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, **2** and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, **3** and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

**4** And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, **5** "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. **6** And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. **7** And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. **8** And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear..."

**11** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. **14** And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **15** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

**Key Points and Discussion Questions from Tim's Sermon:**

Introductory Exercise

Tim revisits the sermon from last week about the Good Samaritan and asks poignantly, "If you were in desperate need of grace, but the only source of grace was from someone you hated, would you receive it?"

What is difficult about receiving grace, even from those we don't hate? Share and discuss. Then take a brief moment to pray for willingness to receive grace as much as possible in the discussion that follows.

Sermon Discussion

Tim suggests that the parable of The Sower poses a new and related set of questions: "Why do we stop wanting grace?" And, "what can we do about it?"

1. What did Tim point out that is unique about this parable compared to all of Jesus's other parables?
2. What does it say about God that He is likened to The Sower in this parable? How does that make you feel towards God?
  - Read the passage from Isaiah.
  - Which is true: A) God's word never returns to him empty (Isaiah 55:11); or B) There are instances where the sowing of God's Word results in no harvest (Luke 8:5-7)
  - How does this contrast make you feel towards God?
3. Where is Jesus in his own parable? Which part of the parable is he? (hint: read John 1:14)
4. The non-yielding soils. (Luke 8:5-7; 12-14)
  - What are three obstacles to receiving God's Word (himself) that Jesus identifies/describes here?
  - Tim challenges us to ask ourselves "which type of soil are you?" Take a moment to personally and courageously contemplate each of these types of soil.
    - Where might evil forces be at work robbing Jesus' love from your life before it can take root? (Soil #1)
    - In what ways has your heart become stone-cold or wind-blown to Jesus? (Soil #2)
    - In what ways are the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life pulling you away from Jesus? (Soil #3)
  - If you are willing, describe an instance in your life when you have seen one of these obstacles get in between you and Jesus.
5. The soil that bears fruit. (Luke 8:8,15)
  - Tim suggests that the simple elegance of the good soil is that it has space for the Word of God to sink in, and that All Saints' Ten Spiritual Formation Practices can be ways for us to make space for the Word of God to sink into our lives. Take turns reading the descriptions of each Spiritual Formation practice (see page 2).
  - Which of these practices appeals to you the most? Which has been a blessing to you in your past? Share and discuss.
  - With regard to these practices, what practical commitments do you want to make to help open more space in your heart for Jesus now? Share and discuss.
  - Take some time to pray specifically for each other to take whatever steps you have shared that you want to take!

## Ten Spiritual Formation Practices of All Saints Church

### **Word & Prayer**

In the words of Eugene Peterson, "God speaks to us; our answers are our prayers." Being told just to "read Scripture and pray" is a little bit like being told by the doctor to exercise - half the battle is just getting started. So All Saints has put together a few simple ways to start incorporating this first practice in your daily life. Find them here.

### **Small Groups**

The Christian journey isn't walked alone, but in community with other Christians. We're not called to love, serve, know people in general, but specific and particular ones. It's in community that we mature and develop as Christ-followers with family, friends and small groups. This community should most naturally be tied to one's local church community.

### **Study**

The Christian life is complex. Scripture is complex. We need to learn from others. Christian theology is a wonderful resource, friend and guide. Study occurs both in individual and group settings.

### **Spiritual Direction**

A spiritual director is a coach, guide, friend. It's someone that's probably a little bit further along on the journey who can help lead through all the twists and turns. It's someone that you intentionally meet with every 6-8 weeks for prayer, direction, support. It's someone who listens, cares, questions and counsels. It's someone you trust and respect and are willing to follow. It doesn't have to or need to be a clergy member. Often, the best directors are not clergy.

### **Sabbath**

We're reminded every night that we are finite creatures in desperate need of rest. We're reminded more fully of that every week. But in a technological world, rest is especially hard to come by. We can work late into the night; e-mail, texts and calls seldom stop and our work hours are varied and blurred. But, we still need to have rhythms, patterns and habits, where we put aside our work and rest so that we might be recreated and re-energized. The ancient Christian practice of Sabbath is a much-needed one today.

### **Retreat**

This is a little longer version to the daily and weekly rest. It's a little longer version of daily reading and prayer. It's an extended and intensified time to listen, learn, pray, be silent, be alone and/or with others and enjoy God's amazing grace.

### **Tithing & Sacrificial Giving**

Tithing or sacrificial giving is a tangible reminder that we're not ultimately to live self-directed lives, but God and other-directed ones. Sacrificial giving is a discipline to make us more generous, joyful, caring and gracious people. The paradox of Christianity is that we are more blessed, satisfied, and fulfilled when we give, rather than when we receive. It was true of our Savior and it's true of us. The goal of sacrificial giving is to more fully display the generosity of Jesus to us in our giving to others.

### **Fasting & Moderation**

We were not made for excess or over-indulgence in anything (other than God!), but to enjoy all things in moderation. One of the ancient practices of the church is to abstain from food (but also other things) for a season, so that we might more fully hunger for God. Learning how to deny ourselves is hard. But learning to say no and to live moderately is vital for those called to "take up our cross" and follow Jesus.

### **Hospitality**

We were made for friendship, relationship and community. True community isn't only receiving from others, but also giving to others. Hospitality is an ancient practice of loving neighbors, strangers, friends in real and tangible ways. It's a way of opening up our lives to others and to God through them. It's a way of embodying the grace that we've received-God's lavish, loving, warm welcome.

### **Service**

Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve, so we also should seek to serve others in real and practical ways. Christian service isn't ultimately about a to-do list, but an attitude, stance, posture. The apostle Paul opened most of his letters with these words, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ." The Greek word he used, was that of the lowest servant. This meant that for Paul, everybody was above him- children, slaves, barbarians. He was ready and eager to serve because he knew he had been served by Christ. Paul's posture is much-needed today, as we seek to become more like Jesus, the true servant of all.