

LITURGY FOR LIFE SERIES GUIDE

written by Jon Ciccarelli

Introduction

Liturgy is not a word many of us are accustomed to hearing in our daily lives. It is not a term that my religious heritage growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has ever used. However, when you study and realize that our very DNA as Christians is woven through various aspects and expressions of God's activity in the history of humanity and the church, you will encounter this word, liturgy. Even before the church existed, the Jewish people of Israel and Judah practiced liturgy.

Many of the festivals and festivities you may have heard of, such as Passover, are significant. The Jewish people had a liturgy (although they didn't use this term) that included rituals of worship, thanksgiving, celebration, prayer, and various spiritual practices, which encouraged them to live an intentional life focused on living a present life to God throughout the different seasons of the year. The festivals were centered around agriculture, particularly the planting and harvesting seasons. God's people relied on Him for their sustenance and recognized Him as the source of their life and blessings; thus, their liturgy incorporated prayers trusting in God to provide the necessary rains and celebrations to rejoice in the harvest He provided.

As Christ established His Church and salvation history continued to unfold, certain expressions of the Church developed a liturgy centered on the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. This is known as the liturgical year or calendar. It includes Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. I wish my Adventist heritage practiced something like a liturgical calendar, as it keeps each calendar year focused on Christ as our Lord and Savior. We anticipate the coming of the Messiah, celebrate His birth, contemplate His death on the cross, rejoice in His resurrection, and welcome the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The literal definition of the word "liturgy" refers to public service or the work of the people, originating from the Greek word "leitourgia" (λειτουργία). For Christians, it provides an intentional and strategic framework to both live in and live out our relationship and discipleship with our Triune God. It helps us stay present with God... to abide with God.

To live a life of liturgy means choosing to live ritually. Now, before you get nervous, I say this because often within Protestant Christianity, the word ritual feels like a negative term. But let me explain. Think about this: anything we truly value or want to grow in, we must live out ritually. If I want a good relationship with my wife, I can't approach it halfheartedly and hope we serendipitously wind up sharing decades together, loving and appreciating each other, and ultimately growing into one in Christ. Living ritually means living with routine. Christian ritual involves embracing routines and various religious practices that we believe are valuable and necessary to experience a full life alive in Christ and His Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven.

Living a liturgy for life with God is our response to His love and grace revealed through Jesus and experienced in His Spirit. This allows us to participate in His divine presence through our worship, celebration, lamentation, prayers, and much more. A liturgy for life serves as a sacred ritual and routine, enabling us to grow in our relationship with God and engage in His mission of love and reconciliation in the world.

Liturgy For Life Week 1

written by Jon Ciccarelli

Week 1, Monday: Worship

Romans 12:1-2

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Worship plays a big role in any liturgy. One thing that frustrates me about the church sometimes is how divided we can be about worship. We can often get distracted from our actual worship of God with our debates, differences, and preferences about worship and what is “wrong and right.” If we aren’t careful, we can end up worshipping various styles of worship instead of God. The act of worship can become an idol.

The passage we are looking at today helps us get a clearer understanding of what true worship is. While there are many aspects to worship, such as when Jesus said in John 4, “God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Or how the worship of God’s people in the Old Testament is described with singing, dancing, and shouting. Romans tells us how to “truly worship Him.” The author says to give our bodies to God because of all He has done for us and to let our bodies be a living and holy sacrifice to God.

So what does all of this mean? The word holy means to be set apart for a special purpose. When someone gets married, they enter into holy matrimony. It means they are setting themselves apart for the person they marry to love, honor, and cherish them. When we choose to set ourselves apart to God, we are choosing to live our lives as a holy sacrifice. A laying down of our lives, or as Jesus said, picking up our cross to follow Him. We do this as a whole person with

our whole selves, our physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, and social selves. This liturgy of worship doesn't allow us to live dualistically, trying to separate the sacred and secular experiences of life. When we grow authentically in our worship with God, we do so with our entire life. Everything becomes sacred because we live with a vision of our life being a life of worship in response to all He has and continues to do in us and for us.

1. What are some things God has done for you that you want to worship Him for?
2. How might you sense God inviting you to set yourself apart to Him?
3. How might you live less dualistically between the sacred and the secular?

Week 1, Tuesday: Celebration

Psalm 8:1-9

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers- the moon and the stars you set in place- what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority- the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

Psalm 8 actually has directions given to it before the first verse. It says, “For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David.” It is believed that gittith means celebration. This is not the only psalm with this term; there are several others. This is a song that David wrote for the people of God to sing and worship God with great celebration.

Celebration is a crucial part of a liturgy for life. It seems so easy sometimes to get so focused on all of the problems in our world and life that if we aren’t careful, we can lose our focus on God and His love and goodness. We can forget in our technological age and driven lives to celebrate the life and created wonder all around us and in ourselves.

In his celebration of God, David draws our attention to some specific areas of wonder and awe of God in our lives. He reminds us that God’s majesty fills the entire earth. He invites us to turn and look at the sky and remember how small we are compared to the vast solar system and universe we live in that God merely spoke into existence, according to Genesis 1. I’ve always been enamored with the solar system, the planets, stars, galaxies, and nebulae. Several years ago, I bought a decent telescope that would give me a better-than-average night sky view. Whenever I would go out in the backyard to look at Jupiter and its moons, Saturn and its rings, or the Orion Nebula, I would tell my wife, “I’m going out in the

backyard to get small.” I always had this sense of looking at something even grander and vaster than the Grand Canyon right in my own backyard. As a result, I often found myself celebrating God’s majesty and creative brilliance.

1. Does celebrating God come naturally for you? If so, why do you think so? If not, why do you think it doesn’t?
2. When you think about God and all that He is and has done, what inspires you to celebrate Him?
3. What could you do today to celebrate God?

Week 1, Wednesday: Celebration

Ephesians 1:3-8

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. [4] Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. [5] God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. [6] So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. [7] He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. [8] He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

We're continuing our focus on celebration for a simple reason. In my opinion, we, as Christians, are not really great at celebrating. Specifically, authentic celebration. Sure, we might be good at celebrating birthdays or holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving. But what about celebrating our God? We began to dig into this area yesterday through Psalm 8, and I'm inviting us to get even more personal with this passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Paul's celebration of God's grace, God's action on our behalf, reminds us that even before God created the world He loved us and chose us to be holy and without fault in His eyes. Our lives have been redeemed and united with God through Christ and this passage says it give God great pleasure. Notice verses 7 and 8, "He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us." The kindness of God causes Paul to praise God . . . to celebrate God, and so that is why he says, "So we praise God."

God's people are a celebrating people. The Church of Christ is a community that celebrates through their praise and worship, celebrating God's generous (showering) love and kindness to all of humanity. Celebration is a critical part of the liturgy, the regular routine lived out by those who realize and

remember that apart from God and His blessing us with His love and grace, there is not much to celebrate.

1. Take a couple of minutes to reflect on God's kindness toward you. What comes to mind?
2. As you contemplate God showering His kindness on you, how does this make you feel?
3. Take a couple of minutes right now to celebrate God and praise Him for His glorious grace He has poured out on you.

Week 1, Thursday: Lament

Lamentations 3:17-20

Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. I cry out, "My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the LORD is lost!" The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.

Every human being experiences loss at various levels. If you have lived for any length of years, chances are you have experienced many losses in your lifetime. A loss can involve anything from a loss of job, the loss of a dream, loss of hope, loss of a loved one, I think you get the idea. With loss comes grief. We don't tend to like to talk about our losses or grieving. However, it is important for us as human beings to acknowledge the various losses we experience. If we don't, chances are we will carry it with us and in us for the rest of our lives, and it will impact our relationships with God and others . . . in negative and burdensome ways. It is healthy for us to grieve, lament, weep, and mourn the losses we experience in life.

The passage we are in today is from a book of lament. It is believed that the prophet Jeremiah wrote the book following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The temple had been destroyed, which represented the presence of God with them. What do you do when your city, your dwelling, and the very representation of God with you are completely destroyed and left for ruin? You lament, cry, wail, and cry out to God. There are five chapters in the Book of Lamentations, which are five poems for lamenting. This book is read annually by Jewish people. Sometimes, you may not know you need to lament until you are invited to think about it and read some poetry on lament. This is why a healthy ritual is so valuable to us as Christ's followers who are intentional about our formation in Christ. We won't drift into Christ being formed in us and deep, mature, Godly spirituality.

Loss has a way of reminding us of what really matters to us in this life. Loss reveals to us what we regard as valuable and meaningful. God invites us to lament with Him and to grieve with Him. He doesn't slap us on the back and say,

“Get over it! Everything will be ok!” Many people are not comfortable with grieving and especially being with people who are grieving. In a society where everything has to feel good, together, and successful, we might want to fix people and not focus on what may be considered the negative things. Life can be very hard, and God gets it. In many places in scripture, God laments, grieves, and even weeps. Be assured that God is with us when we experience loss, grief, and lament.

1. How have you experienced loss in your life?
2. What did you find helpful to you when you have gone through times of loss?
3. How have you sensed God’s heart for you during times of grief?

Week 1, Friday: Lament

Lamentations 3:21-24

Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"

Being that we as people don't tend to lament very well, it is important we spend another day thinking about it. While we can go through some very dark and difficult losses in our lives, we also have incredible hope as Christians. It is very challenging at times to remember this hope or feel hopeful when the loss is overwhelming. This is also why it is so valuable to live our faith in God in the context of community. Following Jesus with others helps us remember our hope even when we might doubt it and can't feel it. When we worship with the body of Christ, there are times when we might not even be able to find the strength and maybe even the belief to sing and worship God. But that is when the body of Christ sings for us. We can listen and still worship with the Church even when we can't. It speaks deep within us at the heart level and can help remind us of the real hope we have in our resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

When my dad was dying, I was able to get some time off and spend the final week of his life with him. He was declining quickly from the cancer he was trying to fight. As the week went on, I would spend time in his room. He was home on hospice care, and there were times when he wouldn't say anything with each day going by. One thing you need to know about my dad is that he was always a man with a plan. He was very disciplined and organized, to say the least. During the week, when he was more present, he would want to go over the 'plan' he had for one thing or another. I remember one night I was sleeping on another bed in the room only a couple of feet from him, and he woke me up to 'go over the plan.' He wanted to ensure I was ready to implement 'the plan' at any time. I laughed a little inside, and at the same time, I realized how afraid he was.

The day my dad passed away, I was in his room alone with him. It was the later afternoon, and he hadn't said anything all day. I was sitting in a chair reading

when he called my name. He said, “Jon?” I said, “Yes, Dad. I’m right here. Do you need anything?” He then said something I have never forgotten and never will. He said, “Let’s let the Lord handle it.” I said, “Yes, Dad. That sounds like a great idea. Let’s let the Lord handle it.” I knew that my dad was no longer afraid and had surrendered his life to Jesus by trusting him. My dad’s grief of dying too soon and the loss of so many hopes and dreams still be lived with his family found was impacted by the hope he had in Jesus and what he would experience when Christ makes all things new again.

1. When you lament, what might you dare to hope about God’s faithful love?
2. What does it mean to you that His mercies begin afresh each morning?
3. What would it mean for you to experience the Lord as your inheritance?

Liturgy For Life Week 2

written by Mark Ricalde

Week 2, Monday: Sabbath Rest

Exodus 20:8-11

“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

This week we are looking at rest. What does it mean to have a rhythm of rest, to practice the discipline of stop. Our passage today from the 10 commandments reminds us how important this is: Out of God’s 10 main directives for his people, he chooses to focus one on Sabbath. One day out of seven, God’s people dedicated it to God. They made it special, they stopped work, and they remembered that God creates everything, we are just along for the ride. This would have been a brand new, counter cultural move, and it still is for us today. Today when rest seems to be absent in our busy schedules, we are challenged to make rest our way of life. What I love about our passage in Exodus 20 is the clear inclusive nature of Sabbath. It was never meant for only a special group. From sons and daughters, female servants, foreigners in the area, and even the donkeys. We are reminded that God instituted Sabbath by setting a time for all, and God means all, creation to rest. Rest is not only found in a solo retreat to your personal self-care routine with a good book. It is a practice that is meant for the community to lean into together. We invite others into our rhythms of rest, in the same way that Jesus invites us when he says “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

1. What is your personal rhythm of rest? Is it intentional, or does it just happen when it happens?
2. Are there ways that you can make rest a community activity? Who is someone in your life that might be needing a partner as they practice the discipline of stop?
3. How can you say yes to Jesus' invitation to come to him? He wants to give you rest today!

Week 2, Tuesday: Promised Rest

Hebrews 4:1-2

God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God.

This passage may be familiar to you if you have been on the study guide journey with us last series as we looked at the better promises found in Hebrews. It is a beautiful section where the author reminds us that there is a full promised rest that we can experience today! It is a rest that is directly tied to our relationship to God, and our listening to the voice of Jesus. It is good news, gospel, but comes with a serious tone. The author begs us to pay attention, because apparently it is easy to miss the promise of rest. The promise is there for any of us to grab on to, but some of us fail to experience it.

The hebrews who receive this letter fail to find rest because they put their faith in things that are incomplete. They celebrate that they are God's holy people who are living in the promised land of milk and honey, a place of promised rest, milk, and honey. But when they look around there is strife, busyness, conflict, and pain. Being in a holy land wasn't enough. They also make all these sub-rules to make sure they are following the commandment on Sabbath we looked at yesterday. What was supposed to be a day of rest became a day of tedious, tiring checkboxes. If that is all the people have to lean on, then the author of Hebrews says they are at risk of missing out on a real and full rest.

Finding rest can be physical, like taking a nap or a nice bath. It can be a mental rest, like putting away your phone and distractions for a set amount of hours. The practice of stop can be emotional, by spending quality time with people who soothe and mend our hearts. True rest is always holistic, which means all the things we just said are temporary solutions. We must have these disciplines alongside the main and most important discipline: listening to God as a form of rest. It is only by taking time to put faith in the creator of rest, that we are

able to truly experience it. The good news is that we can take time with Jesus today.

1. Find some time today or this week to put your phone away, find a comfortable spot, make sure it's quiet, and dedicate the time to listening to God. You don't have to speak. Allow your heart and mind to slow, and then listen.
2. How can you move away from quick fixes to escape busyness and into a full practice of rest?

Week 2, Wednesday: Jubilee Rest

Leviticus 25:1-5

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the Lord said to him, “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the Lord every seventh year. For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the Lord’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year. And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest.

Leviticus 25:8-11

“In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all. Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram’s horn loud and long throughout the land. Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan. This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don’t gather the grapes from your unpruned vines.

What we find in Leviticus 25 is the far reaching implications of the rest God calls us to. Every seven years the Israelites were meant to stop farming on a plot of land to allow the land to have complete rest. And on top of that every 50 years was to be a year of jubilee to celebrate 7 sets of 7 years. That is 8 years of rest for the land every 50 years! The practical side of me wonders how the Israelites were meant to feed themselves during these years. Was it a decline in the economy every 7 years? What did all the farmers do during the year off? But then I am reminded of what modern science has shown us, that land is more productive when it gets rest. That is why farmers rotate their crops, why they plant clover on certain plots to rejuvenate the nitrogen and other elements soil needs to be healthy. We have seen during the Covid shutdowns how the pause of mass

transportation provided rest from pollution to allow nature to bounce back. The creator knows what the earth needs. And God knows the rest we need to bounce back. So take sabbaticals, go on vacation, find an airbnb on the weekend, or turn off all electronics for an extended time period. The land needs extended rest to be reach it's max productiveness. We need rhythms of extended rest to become the full, whole, purpose filled person we are called to be.

1. When is the last time you took a whole day to rest from work, media, distractions, or chores? Would that help?
2. What would it look like to plan a retreat with family or friends? Call someone and start planning!

Week 2, Thursday: Attitude Of Rest

Isaiah 30:15

This is what the Sovereign Lord,
the Holy One of Israel, says:
“Only in returning to me
and resting in me will you be saved.
In quietness and confidence is your strength.
But you would have none of it.

We have spent time so far this week talking about why we rest, the source, the frequency, and the discipline needed to stop. Today our text reminds us of two important truths that round out how we view the practice of rest we are called to.

Firstly, the call to return to rest is a call of grace. You may find yourself having good rhythms in your life, and next thing you know you fall behind at work, or some unexpected situation arises, and now you're caught in the spiral of life. There is always work to do, always entertainment to take part in, always more things asking you to “spend time here.” And just like that we have made time for other things and lost our rhythm of rest. It has happened in my life again and again. Isaiah gently calls us in these moments to return. That when we rest in God, we are saved. So if you ever look at your calendar and see it filled to the max, don't beat yourself up. Set time to rest, and return to a rhythm walking alongside Jesus. Jesus is always calling us to return to him, especially when we feel weary or have heavy burdens.

Secondly, Isaiah gives us a good guideline on the attitude of rest. We are to do it in quietness and confidence. Quietness by letting time stop, letting our mind and heart slow down, and physically allowing silence to reign. These are the moments where we can get glimpses of God's calling and direction, when all distractions and stresses are hushed. This is by no means easy, but we can build our quietness muscles, so that rest becomes a habit our body can more easily fall into. Confidence is key because it allows us to stop without guilt. We have confidence that Jesus saves us, that his work is enough, that if we choose to rest

everything will not fall apart. We also have confidence that Jesus delivers his promise. That by resting, Jesus is able to grow new and better fruit in our life, that by resting, we are investing in the future. But hasn't it always been that way, Jesus doing all the work and us trusting in him?

1. What do you need more of in your life, quietness or confidence? Ask Jesus to give you what you need.
2. Maybe you haven't turned to Jesus in a while. Why don't you take some time to do that today?

Week 2, Friday: Stop And Listen

Jeremiah 6:16-17

This is what the Lord says:

“Stop at the crossroads and look around.

Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it.

Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.

But you reply, ‘No, that’s not the road we want!’

I posted watchmen over you who said,

‘Listen for the sound of the alarm.’

But you replied,

‘No! We won’t pay attention!’

As we finish this week’s focus on the practice of rest, we are reminded that like all disciplines, we need to move forward with full attention. And when we do so, rest becomes more than just healing, it becomes an open door of communication. Moments away from the busyness are the ones where we can truly reflect on our actions and thoughts. Jeremiah reminds us to stop at the crossroads and look around. Every time we set time to stop, we have an opportunity to look at the path we are travelling, and find the “old, godly way” We walk beside Jesus in the same way Adam and Eve walked in the garden with God. Jeremiah also reminds us to listen for the alarm. When we take time to stop and listen, we trust that God is giving us direction, practices to move away from, and practices to move towards.

So as we enter Saturday, our day of rest, I hope that this principle can become a way of life. That you have daily moments to stop and look around, to listen for God’s leading. I pray that you have weekly rhythms of rest, not just for yourself, but for the community you are a part of and beyond. I hope you challenge yourself to install longer retreats or sabbaticals, times for you to really disconnect from distractions, and lean into the God that promises rest, rejuvenation, and a purpose filled life.

For today's questions, I would like you to take time to think of each frequency of rest. Make some goals, and implement them as soon as possible. Don't hesitate!

1. How can you install a daily rhythm of rest? What does that look like?
2. How can you be more intentional with your weekly Sabbath rest? How does it include your community, and the practice of remembrance?
3. Set a date for you to be in extended rest and retreat. What's stopping you from fully committing?

Liturgy For Life Week 3

written by Mark Ricalde

Week 3, Monday: Confession and Forgiveness

Matthew 6:9-14

Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

Give us today the food we need,

and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one.

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

This week we are exploring the themes of confessions, repentance, and forgiveness. These are sometimes difficult subjects to explore, but must be an integral part of our rule of life. So it serves us well to reflect and challenge ourselves this week. In the Lord's prayer, we see a beautiful request to God: "forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us." I like the translations that use "trespass" instead of "sin," I think it gives a more true sense of what we are called to do. How easy it is to accidentally step over the proper boundaries and do harm to someone else. We can wrongfully trespass into someone else's freedom because we are selfishly acting on our own. To understand life is to know that many times people will intentionally or accidentally trespass and do damage in our lives. In the same way we often wander and trespass into a life that is turned away from God. So our prayer is that we can extend grace to those who trespass against us, and ask God to extend that same grace for us everyday.

When we make confession and repentance a habit in our life, our capacity to forgive increases. We empathise with being in the wrong or being the source of hurt, and we then humbly ask God to forgive. God always does. Hopefully we can extend that empathy to others, and believe that others are trying their best, and we try our best to forgive them?

1. Is there someone in your life who has trespassed against you recently? Can you find it in your heart to forgive them?
2. What is heavy or hidden in your heart that needs to be confessed to Jesus? Share openly with him today!

Week 3, Tuesday: Confession

1 John 1:5-10

This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

Often when we think of justice, we think of making rights wrong, and demanding payback for those who have done damage. That can be important. But when I look at my own life, there is no chance that I can pay back the collective wrongs I have done. So this passage gives me an abundance of hope. That God is faithful and just in God's way. Justice for God is a forgiving of our sin and a cleansing of our hearts. God brings healing and a fresh start. I don't have to pay the ultimate price for the way sin has worked in my life, Jesus' blood paid that price for me.

The first and only step to experiencing this gift of forgiveness is to bring our sin to light. This is confession. To declare with faith that we want to be in the light, and bring our trespasses into the light. When we are honest with ourselves, when we walk with Jesus without holding back our secrets, then the darkness in us wanes. Because Jesus who is light banishes darkness. Confession is a holy practice. We bring our failings to God, we ask God to be a light in our life, and God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us.

Often I go through life so fast that I don't have time to reflect on the intentions and actions of my day. So I am trying to install a rhythm of confession in my life. What would happen if I reflected with Jesus a recap of my day? What if I confessed moments where I was selfish, where I hurt others, reflected on my

actions. Jesus invites us to do just that, and he promises fellowship with us, to lead us through life with light, truth, and love.

1. What would it look like to make confession a daily habit? What do you think would change if you tried it?
2. Do you tend to keep your mistakes in the dark? Do you get embarrassed when people know you have failed? Wrestle with that today, and bring your confessions to Jesus.

Week 3, Wednesday: Process And Patience

Psalm 32:1-5

Oh, what joy for those

whose disobedience is forgiven,

whose sin is put out of sight!

Yes, what joy for those

whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt,

whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

When I refused to confess my sin,

my body wasted away,

and I groaned all day long.

Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.

My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Interlude

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you

and stopped trying to hide my guilt.

I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord."

And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

The psalmist's prayer today reveals the struggle of the process of confession and repentance. It is not always easy to say "Hey, Jesus, these are things I've done and they are awful," or "I'm not as great as I thought I was." Even harder still is to go to your community and say "can I be honest, I have been hurting you and I'm sorry." But yet we must. To live holding on to sin and secrets, resentment and pride, these are a recipe for our body wasting away. No one wants to live hiding in guilt, or feeling heavy, or having our "strength evaporated" as the psalmist says.

It is easy to say, "just confess and it is all good," and it would be wrong in some ways to say this, because our text shows us the emotions behind confession. While confession can happen in a moment, forgiveness is a slow process. There is healing involved that takes time. There is discipline involved that is slow. Especially in our human to human interactions, confession and forgiveness is a process that requires patience, listening, and time. I hope this reality is encouraging to you, because the relationships that are broken around

you have hope of repair, but it's a process that can't be forced. All we can do today is confess, repent, and try to walk in the light. Tomorrow we wake up, and do it all over again.

1. Do you have a tendency to say "I'm sorry" and expect everything to be great? How can we remind ourselves that healing takes time?
2. Is there someone in your life that has hurt you so much that it's hard to forgive? Does it change your understanding to know you can forgive them and still have wounds that need healing?

Week 3, Thursday: Bold Forgiveness

Hebrews 4:14-16

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

The directive is clear. We move with the boldness and firmness we are called to in our Hebrews text today. We understand that humanity lives in a state of weakness; we will always be causing reasons to confess and forgive. Sin reigns in what seems like a perpetual cycle. Yet we have a beautiful promise that Jesus who understands our weakness has an abundance of mercy and grace for us when we need it the most. The older we get, the need for confession and forgiveness increases, and so to make it a habit is necessary. Because when we do so, grace reigns over sin, and mercy over trespass.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote much on forgiveness. Here's one of his more famous quotes: "Forgiveness is the only way to heal ourselves and to be free from the past. Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us. We are bound to the chains of bitterness, tied together, trapped. Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, that person will hold the keys to our happiness, that person will be our jailor. When we forgive, we take back control of our own fate and our feelings. We become our own liberator."

When we forgive, we are choosing who reigns in our life. We choose to free ourselves from the pain and hurt that someone caused us. We release them from having a hold on our future, and we move forward towards healing. That does not mean the relationship gets fixed immediately, or ever, but it means we can start to heal. So when we forgive others it is a bold move of grace on the perpetrator and ourselves.

It is a bold move to also come to Jesus with repentant hearts. But God invites us to do just that. Because he is also in the business of giving us freedom

from guilt, to give us grace when we need it the most, and to start the process of healing. Our own internal healing also takes time, but the practice of confession and walking in the light will guide us each day.

1. Who do you need to forgive that you haven't. Be bold and forgive them, free yourself from the chains of bitterness and resentment.
2. How does it feel to know Jesus understands your weakness? Be fully transparent in your time with him. He has more than enough mercy to spare.

Week 3, Friday: Forgiveness And Resurrection

2 Timothy 2:8-11

Always remember that Jesus Christ, a descendant of King David, was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the word of God cannot be chained. So I am willing to endure anything if it will bring salvation and eternal glory in Christ Jesus to those God has chosen.

This is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him,

we will also live with him.

This week has been filled with a challenge. To install a practice of confession in our life is difficult. To forgive others takes courage. Trying to deal with the messiness of trespasses in our life can feel like exhausting suffering. But our promise today reminds us that forgiveness lives in the same realm as resurrection. We forgive others hoping that the transformative new life we experience can be Good News in our friendships. We are transparent and open in our time with Jesus because we believe it leads to new life in him.

When I was in high school, I remember being part of an amazing youth worship service at camp meeting. The adults were in the building across the field, and I guess our worship sounded like noise to them. And so one of the church leaders (everyone knew who he was) stomped into the youth building, walked to the soundboard, and started frantically moving all the sliders down. We turned around to see the church leader, standing at the booth in his suit, clearly upset. So we did what all youth would do, we booed him. We rightly thought that the way we were worshiping was true, honest, and right. I remember thinking “this might not be the church for me.”

The next morning as my friends and I filled the youth tent for morning worship, there was the church leader at the front of the room. He stood awkwardly with his suit on, waiting for all of us to arrive. What he did next shocked us. He opened up with the words “I’m sorry...” and started crying. He apologised for his actions, and told us he tossed and turned all night realising the

damage he had done. He asked for forgiveness, and told us that even though last night didn't show it, he believed that the youth are the future of the church. He stayed with us the whole youth service. At the end he stood at the door and shook every high schoolers hands saying, "I'm so sorry, forgive me, the church needs you." I remember thinking "This is the church for me."

Confession and forgiveness have power. It is the very essence of the gospel, the good news that Jesus died to extend forgiveness and mercy to us. Let's make it a habit in our daily rhythm. New life will follow.

Liturgy For Life Week 4

written by Jon Ciccarelli

Week 4, Monday: Prayer

Luke 18:9-14

Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank you, God, that I am not like other people-cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Prayer. How does prayer work? Why are we supposed to pray? Is God even listening? These are just a few of the questions I have been asked as a pastor. It seems that no matter how old someone is or how long they've been a Christian, these questions and similar ones keep coming up. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are three spiritual practices that Jesus discussed regularly in His ministry. In fact, Luke 18:1 tells us why Jesus shared this story. Luke writes, "One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up."

The passage we are reading today is one of those stories. Jesus tells this story to encourage us to never give up on praying. He wants us to understand how important prayer is for our relationship and connection with Him. He encourages us to persist; never quit praying. In this story about the Pharisee and the despised tax collector, we see that what matters most to God in prayer is being genuine—being real with God and with ourselves. I love this about God. He doesn't want us to put on a show for Him or act in a way that isn't our true self. He

desires a genuine, authentic, and transparent relationship with us, which also means having an authentic conversation with Him.

What this means is that we can talk to Him anytime and all the time. We can communicate with God when we are mad, sad, glad, fearful, hurt, angry, rejoicing, confessing, frustrated, or in whatever state we may be. He can handle it all. And... He loves to hear your voice. You are His beloved child, a cherished creation made in His image. You never have to have it all together before speaking with God. Remember, He loves you, and you can never say a bad or wrong prayer because He will always be willing to listen.

1. What has your experience with God through prayer been like so far in your relationship with Him?
2. Do you believe you can discuss anything with God, regardless of the topic? Why or why not?
3. Since prayer is a conversation with God, what do you think about sometimes being silent and quieting yourself enough to listen to Him?

Week 4, Tuesday: Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

"And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

I remember waking up one morning as a kid and walking to the kitchen for breakfast. It was Saturday, and my mom usually had something special on the table since it was the day we celebrated the Sabbath and went to church. When I reached the kitchen table, I noticed that the usual breakfast items were missing. I asked my mom where everything was. She then explained that we weren't going to eat today, or at least not as much as we were used to. I was so confused. What do you mean we're not eating today? This made no sense to me. She continued to explain that we were going to fast and that the whole church was fasting that day. Fasting, she said, is about going without something as a sacrifice to God. As a kid, I was not interested in this fasting idea or offering a sacrifice to God! As I recall this experience from my childhood, I wish I could tell you I remember some deeply spiritual and profound truth my mother passed down to the next generation of the Ciccarelli lineage. But I don't. All I remember is, "We're not eating today."

If you study fasting in the Bible, you will find that it occurs quite frequently. God's people in the Old Testament fasted regularly, especially during times of mourning and when seeking God. Jesus also fasted. After His baptism, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, where He fasted for forty nights. He also fasted and prayed the night before He called the disciples. The book of Acts mentions that while the apostles were worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them about setting apart Barnabas and Paul for the work God was calling them to.

Here is what I believe is the key to fasting that I learned from a mentor of mine years ago. The key to fasting is not to focus on what you are fasting from

but rather on what you will be feasting on. You see, the emphasis of fasting is on feasting—feasting on God and feasting on His Word. Fasting is a spiritual practice that serves to enhance your relationship with God. Too often, fasting can feel like the master while we are the slaves, but it is actually a means to serve us and help us feast on God. Fasting creates space for us to turn our attention to God and to give Him more of our focus. So, if we are fasting from food, we allow the hunger pains to remind us to feast on a verse of Scripture, because as Jesus said, man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Or, if we are fasting from media, whenever we habitually want to watch a video or listen to something, we can use that urge to remind us to seek God in our day. While we fast, it is also essential to understand that we do not fast to earn God's love. We cannot do anything to make God love us any more than He already does. His love for us never changes. He loves us whether we fast or not.

1. What has your experience been with fasting? Have you ever tried it? If not, do you think you might in the future?
2. What do you think it was like for Jesus when He fasted for 40 nights? How do you believe it affected Him?
3. What are your thoughts on the concept of fasting as feasting on God instead of fasting from something?

Week 4, Wednesday: Solitude

Luke 5:15-16

But despite Jesus' instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

Mark 1:35

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.

John 12:36

After saying these things, Jesus went away and was hidden from them.

Our passages today reveal how disciplined Jesus was about His time with His Heavenly Father. At one point in His life and ministry, Jesus said that He and His Father were so close and worked so intimately together that He didn't say anything He didn't hear His Father saying or do anything He didn't see His Father doing. That is a very close relationship. One night while praying with His Father, Jesus prayed for us. He prayed that we would have the same relationship with Him as He had with His Father. And, through His Spirit, it is possible. We can grow deeply in our relationship with God if we desire to. It does require some intentionality and a decision to make it more than just a desire but an actual priority. Solitude, time alone with God, is essential for us to experience the life God created us for. He created us for the purpose of relationship. A very personal and intimate relationship. He didn't create us with the intent of never knowing us and of not sharing life together.

A great relationship requires a vision to have the relationship and that it is something I value and desire. It then requires me to be intentional about it. The question now is, how will I be intentional? This is where the means come into play. The means represent the how and what of the equation. What actions will I take because I have this vision and intention? For a great relationship to become a reality, time is always involved: time spent together, time devoted to one another,

and time spent talking and listening to each other—focused time without distractions.

This is what Jesus had with the Father: time together listening and talking without distractions. Jesus's relationship with His Father was so important to Him that "He often withdrew to the wilderness" (read lonely place here). He would get up early and go "to an isolated place" where He could give His Father all of His attention.

It is evident that Jesus practiced the ritual of solitude. As we follow Jesus and live our lives at His feet as His disciples and apprentices, we will also walk with Him into the lonely places—often, just as He did and continues to do. We don't remain in these lonely places; rather, we visit them frequently because that is what Jesus invites us to join Him in. Furthermore, we follow His lead out of the lonely places and into the world, allowing all that He fills us with during our times of solitude to overflow into the lives of those we encounter at home, in the workplace, at school, and even with strangers we meet along the way.

If solitude with God is new to you, I encourage you to start slowly—perhaps with just 5 to 15 minutes of being still and recognizing that God is with you. Talk to God about anything on your heart and mind, and allow yourself some space to be silent and learn to listen. Also, engaging in fun activities like drawing, listening to music that inspires you to focus on God, or doing something physical like walking, jogging, or stretching can be great too. Let it be a learning experience, and remember that progress, not perfection, is the intention.

1. Is solitude with God something you already practice? If so, how has it developed over the months or years? If not, what are your thoughts on it? Is it something you might want to start doing?
2. Using your imagination, how do you envision the times of solitude that Jesus spent with His Father? What do you think their conversations were like? What emotions do you think they experienced?
3. Since we are all wired differently, with some of us being morning people, some night people, and some middle-of-the-day type of people, what time of the day is best for you to practice some time alone with God?

Week 4, Thursday: Silence

Psalm 62:1-2

I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will never be shaken.

Psalm 62:5-6

Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken.

Psalm 62:7

My victory and honor come from God alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me.

I think we have become accustomed to noise. It is almost difficult to think of spaces in our lives where there isn't much noise. Sometimes I like to practice a mindfulness activity where I just listen. I try to notice how many things I can hear in the moment. It is amazing how many things are making some type of sound. There are often so many sounds happening at one time in every moment of our lives that we are not even aware of them. I invite you right now to just stop and listen. See how many different things you can hear in the moment. See if you can count them all and discern what they are. I like to sit in my backyard and do this from time to time. It is pretty amazing. Often, I can hear multiple different types of birds chirping or singing. I notice the sound of cars driving nearby, the freeway off in the distance, the sound of the wind or breeze, my dogs panting, some neighbors talking to each other, and so many other possible sounds on any given day. My point is that we are almost swimming in sound.

If we want to live less frantically and feel less overwhelmed, it will be important for us to practice moments of silence. Times where we hit pause in our lives and intentionally turn off the noise. Silence often accompanies periods of solitude, but not always necessarily. I love the lyrics from a Switchfoot song called "Adding To The Noise." In the song, they say to the listener, "If we're adding to the noise, turn off this song." I love that. When we make time for silence, we will be able to listen to our hearts and pay attention to the feelings within us. We can

reflect on our thoughts or even give our minds a rest from all the processing and thinking we've been doing.

The other thing silence helps us with is remembering that who we are is not determined by what others and society say we are or should be. This is what the psalmist conveys in today's passage. In his waiting quietly for and with God, he recognizes that God alone is his rock, salvation, and fortress for life. He is reminded that God alone is Who is hope needs to be in. The honor he desires and needs comes from God and God alone. I also love this verse from the Psalms: "Be still and know that I am God." I appreciate how The Message translation puts it: "Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above politics, above everything."

1. What are your thoughts on spending moments in silence with God? Is it something you currently practice or something you can envision yourself doing?
2. Sometimes, the idea of being still and spending time in silence can be frightening and may lead to feelings of anxiety. This is because we often rely on noise and busyness to distract us from thinking and reflecting on our lives. What are your thoughts on this?
3. If you were going to spend a few minutes practicing silence with God, where would you do it? How long would you like to do it? What do you anticipate it might feel like to be silent with Jesus?

Week 4, Friday: Statio

Matthew 11:28-30

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

"Hurry up!" Doesn't just reading that statement stress you out? It seems like rushing is the normal pace in our lives and culture these days. When we pause or slow down, it feels as if we are not doing something that is considered "normal." In fact, it seems abnormal to be less hurried and to take moments to pause and be present with God, ourselves, or others. To be mindful in the moments of our lives that seem to be flying by so quickly. So fast.

Today, we are discussing a spiritual practice that many people may not be familiar with. This practice is called statio, derived from a Latin term meaning "to stand still." In ancient Rome, it was commonly used in a military context to refer to a soldier's post or watch. For modern disciples of Jesus, it means pausing at various moments in your day to be mindful of God's presence and His activity around you. It's a simple yet powerful practice that enhances our interaction with God throughout the day. It allows us to create margin or space between our various activities. For instance, it could involve arriving a few minutes early to a meeting, class, or appointment, taking a few slow, deep breaths, and asking Jesus to guide you in being aware of what He is doing in that space. It might mean taking a moment before going to bed to reflect on your day and asking the Holy Spirit to help you notice where you experience His presence, both in your life and in the lives of those you interacted with that day. Additionally, it could involve using moments when you are forced to slow down and wait—like sitting in traffic, standing in line at the grocery store, or waiting at the DMV—as opportunities to practice this sacred pause, breathing deeply and seeking God's presence with you and around you.

This is very much the type of rhythm of life Jesus invites us to share with Him when He offers His yoke to us. When we decide to live in Jesus's yoke with

Him, it becomes a yoke of learning from Him how to live less hurriedly. When you read the Gospels, do you ever see Jesus hurried? Nope. It's not there. Jesus was a very busy person, but never hurried. As apprentices of Jesus, we are being trained by Him to live an incredibly beautiful and wonder-filled life because it is lived with Him. As we walk with Him in His yoke, we walk at the pace of grace, love, mercy, and compassion.

I love how The Message translation interprets our text for today. I leave it with you to enjoy and reflect on with Jesus and consider how you might incorporate the practice of *statio* into your life and daily rhythm. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

1. Have you ever heard of *statio* before today? If not, what do you think about it? If so, how have you practiced it, and what are some moments that you remember being particularly meaningful for you?
2. Take a moment to reflect on the pace of your daily rhythm of life. How is the speed of your typical day? How might you practice *statio* to give yourself the grace of margin to remember that you are a human being created in the image of God and not a human doing?
3. Imagine walking with Jesus, side by side. How fast are you walking? Now take a couple of minutes to visualize you and Jesus walking together through your day today, from morning until the time you go to bed. What pace is He inviting you to take with Him? When does He pause (*statio*) with you? What are you noticing as you pay attention to Jesus while visualizing this day together?

Liturgy For Life Week 5

written by Jon Ciccarelli

Week 5, Monday: Gratitude

Colossians 3:15-17 (NIV)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This passage is one of my favorites in the entire Scripture. Actually, I like to take it all in from verse 1 through 17. I want to nudge you to take some time today to read everything leading up to our verses for today, as it informs these three verses we are marinating in. I like to refer to these three verses as the triptych of gratitude and thankfulness. A triptych is a piece of art composed of three separate pieces. They were first depicted in churches during the Middle Ages and were often painted on wooden panels. These triptychs related various Bible stories to encourage and invite people to engage with God in prayer. I invite you to engage with the passage for today as you would with a work of art, painted and expressed across three panels, much like a triptych.

Notice the first 'panel.' Linger over the verse like you would a painting at a museum in an unhurried way, with perfect lighting and nothing else around the painting to distract except the second panel next to it. How is the peace of Christ ruling in your heart, and the body of Christ called to peace being expressed in your imagination? How are you feeling thankful?

Notice now the second 'panel.' While still in the museum setting, linger in front of this panel, located at the center of the triptych. What are you noticing about the message of Christ dwelling among the body of Christ richly in how it is

expressed in verse 16? How does this bring about gratitude in your heart and the hearts of Christ's people?

Now shift to the third panel, verse 17, and linger just a little longer, and take in what you see with your mind and heart's eye. What is it looking like to do and be in the name of your Lord Jesus, and giving thanks to God the Father through Him?

The words used for 'thankful' and 'thanks' in verses 15 & 17 are the Greek word εὐχάριστος, which is where we get the word 'eucharist', another term for The Lord's Supper, commonly referred to as communion. This is the meal that Jesus instituted on the night He was betrayed and called all His disciples to share together in remembrance of Him. So, the very meal Jesus calls us, as His disciples, to center our fellowship and life around is a table of thanksgiving. The word for "gratitude" is the same word for "grace" in the Greek New Testament. When we recognize that all God has graciously given us through Jesus Christ for our life and salvation, gratitude is the natural attitude of the heart.

1. What are the things you noticed most when you stood in front of the triptych?
2. Is there anything Jesus is inviting you to bask in regarding His grace, unconditional love, and favor towards you? Pause for at least 1-2 minutes to engage in this spiritual practice.
3. Are there people in your life you can think of that you have experienced God's lavish grace towards you through? Take a minute to contemplate this, and if so, send them a text, note, or tell them, and share with them how they have been an agent of God's grace and love toward you

Week 5, Tuesday: Hospitality

Luke 22:17-19

Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. [18] For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come." [19] He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Take some time to read the verses above again. Do it slowly and even breathe slowly as you read it. Imagine inhaling everything of God's Spirit Jesus desires for you to take in through this passage. We are picking up where we left off with yesterday's thought and meditation regarding the meal Jesus instituted that night with His disciples when He broke the bread and said, "This is My body given for you." And, "This is my blood shed for you." What I want to focus on today, however, is the table.

The table Christ always shared with people was the table of hospitality. Jesus was constantly getting into trouble with the religious leaders of His day because of the people He invited to share a table with. His table was and continues to be the table of love, compassion, inclusivity, redemption, and reconciliation. Everyone who shared a table with Jesus felt seen, valued, dignified, empowered, and loved. In contrast, everyone the religious leaders shared a table with felt unseen, devalued, dehumanized, overpowered, and undesirable.

Imagine sitting at the table of hospitality with Jesus. How might you feel seen, valued, dignified, empowered, and loved? Sit there with Jesus. Be still. Receive His presence and all that He thinks about you and feels for you. Let yourself receive all that He wants to express toward you as His beloved child and disciple.

Now that you have done this. How might Jesus be nudging you to invite someone to your table? Who do you sense Jesus wants to know that He sees them, values them, and loves them...through you? Through the living Christ in you. You see, hospitality in the Kingdom of God is always based on who Jesus invites.

1. Is there a table of hospitality Jesus is asking you to set? What might it look like? Might it be around a cup of coffee or tea? A meal or a snack?
2. How is The Spirit of Christ asking you to engage in a spirit of hospitality without a physical table, but in those you engage with at work, school, home, or in the day-to-day with those in the community you cross paths with while shopping or tending to the tasks of the day?

Week 5, Wednesday: Secrecy

Matthew 6:1; 3-4 (ESV)

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven... But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The spiritual practice of secrecy is one of my favorites. I find it very fun to do. It enables us to experience what Jesus teaches in today's passage. As human beings, it seems too easy and natural for us to seek adoration and approval from others. If we aren't careful, we can go through life chasing the addiction of approval from others, which can hinder us from experiencing God's love and acceptance of us as His beloved.

The spiritual practice of secrecy helps us live for an audience of one. It helps us seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, rather than the less satisfying things associated with personal human empires. We don't engage in this practice to seek God's approval or to earn merit and favor from God. We already have it by His grace toward us revealed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We do it because we want to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18)

The spiritual practice of secrecy is quite simple. Do something kind for someone else without them or anyone else knowing it was you who did it, except for God. It is a secret between you and God. No one else gets to know. This practice helps us in that it allows Jesus to train us to become less dependent on others for approval and acceptance, and to grow and learn how to rest in God's love, approval, and acceptance alone. It helps us with our sometimes overinflated sense of self. It helps us develop a healthy sense of self that God created us with and desires for us.

1. How can you envision participating with Jesus in this spiritual exercise this week? Talk with Jesus about it and do it with Him. Plan it with Him.

2. Is this a practice you can see yourself engaging in 'ritualistically?' More than a once-in-a-while type of engagement...maybe putting it in your schedule once a month or a couple of times a month?
3. If you choose to practice this spiritual discipline, take time following the activity to reflect on it with Jesus and share your thoughts and feelings with Him, and listen for what His experience was like doing it with you.

Week 5, Thursday: Reflecting On The Journey

John 8:31-32 (NIV)

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

I love these words of Jesus from the Gospel of John. Jesus is so clear in His clarification of what the absolute truth is. The word 'hold' in this passage is the same word interpreted as abide and to remain. So Jesus is saying, 'If you abide, if you remain in my teaching, you are really my disciples.' Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

All of the spiritual exercises we have practiced in this series guide are not the end. They're not the goal and the master of the spiritual life with Jesus. They are a means to serve us in creating the necessary space to aid us in giving Jesus our attention. They help us shift our focus and look away from the busyness and hurriedness of our lives, as well as the many distractions, so we can look to, listen to, and pay attention to Jesus. They help us live life with Jesus, rather than living life for Jesus. They are things we can do to provide space for us to grow in our relationship with Jesus. This is what Jesus is most concerned about – our relationship with Him. He created us to have the most incredibly intimate relationship with Him that is real and authentic, transparent and vulnerable, and founded and rooted in His sacrificial love for us, no matter what.

We were created to abide, to remain with Jesus in this life and for eternity. This is why He came, died, and rose again, so nothing would get in the way of us remaining with Him for eternity. And just like any healthy and genuine relationship, it takes effort. The practices are a great way for us to lean into our relationship with Jesus. They are an avenue and a means to provide a way for us to connect with Jesus. We won't ever merely drift into an amazing relationship with Jesus, just like no one ever drifts into an incredible marriage relationship. Some type of ritual and discipline has to be involved. Suppose I am ritualistic about my relationship with my wife. In that case, I'm going to be very intentional about putting effort into and exercising various practices that will help me know her

better, love her more, and strengthen our relationship, things such as spending quality time with her and not just sporadically whenever it happens. I'm going to plan dates with her so we can share life in fun and personal ways. I'm going to learn how to be a better communicator and a better listener. These are just a few things that will strengthen our relationship and enable us to experience a deeper, more profound love together.

1. How are you seeing ritual, a liturgy for life with Jesus, as essential and life-giving to your relationship with Him?
2. What are some of the spiritual practices we have studied in this series that you have found helpful in experiencing Jesus?
3. Are there any practices you sense Jesus is inviting you to try on?

Week 5, Friday: Conclusion

Matthew 11:27-30 (MSG)

“The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

As we conclude this series, I would like us to revisit a passage we looked at in week four. I shared the Message translation with you at the end of the reflection for that day’s reading. But I didn’t share what led up to the portion I left you with. Notice what Jesus’ intent is: “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.” Because of this desire He has for us to experience with Him, He invites us into His yoke. “Come to Me” He says. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. Walk with Me and work with Me. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.

All of the practices and the intentional rituals are learning from Jesus how to live in His rhythm of grace and love. It is His rhythm of grace and love experienced through His presence that enables us to live freely and lightly with a deep satisfaction, purpose, and meaning in life that nothing and no one else can ever provide. We never do the practices to get Jesus to love us more or grant us more favor and mercy. He freely offers us His grace and mercy because of His love for us. The practices simply help us abide with Him in His love. Jesus is always abiding with us. Always. Living with a liturgy for life with Jesus helps us become more aware of His presence that always remains with us.

1. Please know that all of our campus pastors are available and willing to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus, and they are happy to come alongside you to support you in your abiding relationship with Him.
2. If spiritual practices and a liturgy for life are new to you and you would like to explore them further, who would you connect with to learn more and share the journey with?
3. Online resources and opportunities can also be found at crosswalkvillage.com/discipleship