

Here's a few statements that I'm not sure we'd hear in a church:

- Hey! It's my turn to sit in the front pew!
- I was so captivated; I hardly noticed that your sermon went over 25 minutes.
- Personally, I find witnessing much more enjoyable than golf.
- I volunteer to be the permanent teacher for the Junior High Sunday School class.
- Since we're all here, let's start the worship service early!
- Nothing inspires me more than our annual stewardship campaign! And finally,
- I love it when we sing hymns I've never heard before!

Speaking of church life. Today, we're going to start a 6-week sermon series based on *The Walk* by Adam Hamilton's. Each week we're going to look at practices that can help have a closer walk with God.

Today we start with the foundational practices of worship and prayer. Practices vital to cultivating a growing spirit. Think about a time when you gave someone a particularly nice gift. Remember when they opened it? That look of joy on their face. Maybe they squealed. Did they say I love it! And did they say Thank you?

That gift was given with the idea that it would be loved and enjoyed. Do you realize that God created this amazing planet and gave it to us as an expression of love for us. It was intended for our enjoyment and adventure. How do we respond to a gift like this? Would we not say things like "Thank you" and "I love you"!

Worship and prayer are practices that help us grow and mature in our Christian walk. We see worship practiced throughout Scripture and lived by Jesus. The foundation of the spiritual life of God's people for thousands of years.

God is worthy of and desires our worship. Our souls need worship. We were created for worship.

Evelyn Underhill, in her 1936 book called *Worship* described it like this. "Worship, in all its grades and kinds, is the response of the creature to the Eternal". To put it in slightly more modern terms. Worship is the primary and appropriate response of creation to the Creator.

Evelyn also said “Nor need we limit this definition to the human sphere.... we may think of the whole of the Universe, seen and unseen, conscious and unconscious, as an act of worship”.

Everything that God created reflects God’s glory. Look all around you. Displays of God’s glory everywhere. Bees buzzing, lions roaring, the orange, red, and yellow of maple leaves in the fall, white snow in the winter, flowers blooming in the spring. On a clear night when we look up at the moon and stars, they declare God’s praise.

The birds...they cannot help but sing. The stars...they cannot help but shine. But human beings are unique in the world of creation. We have a choice. We get to decide if we’ll give thanks to God, if we’ll praise God, and if we’ll seek to glorify God with our lives. Thankfully we have something within us longing to worship.

What are the two most important phrases in the English language? How about Thank you and I love you.

We are created as objects of God’s love and affection, and we are created to give glory to God. The modern English word “worship” comes from an Old English word, *worþscip*. *Worþscip* is when someone or something is recognized as worthy of honor. Worship is how we respond to a Creator who is uniquely worthy of our admiration, our reverence, our awe, our thanksgiving, and our praise.

Revelations gives us an astounding picture of worship. Chapter 4 describes the throne room of God. God is surrounded by winged creatures. There are twenty-four elders representing the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus. All of them wear crowns. We hear the winged creatures sing a familiar song. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come”. In response, the 24 elders cast their crowns before the throne in humility. Then they sing in response to the winged creatures, another familiar song.

You are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, because you created all things. It is by your will that they existed and were created.

Worship is the fitting response of all creation to the creator, to the one who made all things. We were made to give glory to God. Praise is not merely found in words. It's in the heart and every part of our being. We were created to be a living hallelujah.

Let's look at 2 dimensions of worship that are important to the Christian spiritual life. Worshiping together as a church family and daily worship through individual prayer.

Psalm 95:6-7 calls us to communal worship: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Think about the pronouns we just heard. Us, Our, We. This psalm is a call to communal worship. In contrast Psalm 23 is a call to individual prayer. "The Lord is MY shepherd; I shall not want. "

Jews and Christians may gather on any day to worship, some gather daily. Don't worry, I'm not suggesting that here. There is one day of the week above all that we gather for worship. What is that day called for both Jews and Christians? The Sabbath. For Jews this goes from Friday evening to Saturday at sunset. Why is this day their Sabbath? It is the day they believe that God rested from creation. Christians usually celebrate Sabbath on what day? Anyone remember why? It's the day that Christians believe Jesus was raised from the dead. Every Sunday is a mini-Easter. From the book of Acts we get a picture of what a Sabbath celebration looked like in the early church. They

- Prayed with and for one another, giving thanks to God
- Sang psalms and hymns and spiritual songs together to God
- Broke bread together, sharing the Lord's supper as a way of communion with Christ and each other.
- Confessed their sins to God and one another.
- Reflected together on scriptures and stories, that they might be more faithful followers of Jesus.
- Sought to encourage one another, spurring one another to a life of love and good deeds.
- Collected an offering expressing love and gratitude to God while seeking to help others.

Worship is not just something we attend; it isn't something we just watched. It's something we do. We don't gather to be entertained, we gather to respond to God's love and grace with praise and gratitude. This time together is all about offering ourselves to God, joining together in authentic worship, seeking to bless God and to be used by God.

Here are some ways to do more than just show up on a Sunday.

- Get here a little early so you can spend time in prayer.
- Ask God to speak to you through Scripture and the sermon.
- Take notes.
- Bring your bible.
- Take time to think about the meaning of communion when we celebrate.
- See your offering as an expression of gratitude to God.
- Ask to leave with a better sense of who you are and Who's you are.
- Finally, ask God to send you as an ambassador in the world.

Communal worship helps us build relationships and a sense of belonging to a community. We are recharged. If we don't plug in our cell phones overnight, what happens? Our souls are like our phones. They need recharging and communal worship is a way to do that.

How frequently should we join in communal worship? It's a fact that Christians are worshipping together less and less. It's down to an average of 2 times a month. There are many things competing with communal worship. Children and their activities. Work schedules. Empty nesters and retirees who travel.

How often do you think Scripture tells us to be in worship? Every weekend. That may seem like a lot, but that's the goal. I realize it's not always possible to worship in this church every week, for many reasons. But when you can't be here, can you worship in some way. How about online? When you are traveling, can you find a place of worship? There are over 22,000 Methodist churches in the US. The probability of finding one is pretty high. How about our new Thursday night worship service starting this week?

Let's go back in time to our school days. What percent did you need to get an A? Great...so to get an A in worship for the year, how many weeks do you think you can miss? 5 weeks. Gold stars to anyone who gets a 90% on attendance in worship this year?

Communal worship is important and so is the daily worship we practice in our personal lives. This practice is composed of our prayers and actions. In our prayers we praise, we confess, we ask God for help, and we give thanks.

A 2012 study found that we complain more than we give thanks. Surprise? Out of 2000 adults, only 52 percent of women and 44 percent of men took time to express gratitude at least once a week.

But expressing thanks is not just important to God, it's important for our own emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk said. "It is not happiness that makes us grateful. It is gratefulness that makes us happy." We are not called to give thanks because our lives are going wonderfully. We're called to give thanks because life itself is gift from God.

For Christians, cultivating gratitude starts with giving thanks to God. Gratitude is a powerful practice and so is prayer. Can you spend time in prayer with God on a daily basis? I'm asking you to consider praying 5 times a day. One time for each finger on a hand. You start out when you wake up, you give thanks at each meal, and then you pray before you go to bed.

We've set goals for communal worship and prayer. But how do we pray? Again, we look at our hands. Make a fist with your dominant hand and leave your other hand unclenched. The clenched hand is your reminder of the importance of communal worship. Now look at your other hand. Your five fingers are to remind you of your 5 goals for praying daily.

Again, How do we pray? There are many ways. You can pray the scriptures. You can use the Lord's Prayer as an outline. Notice I said an outline. Don't just pray the Lord's prayer. Look back at that unclenched hand. Fingers can serve as an outline of prayer starting with our thumbs.

- We Praise.
- We offer Thanksgiving.
- We confess.

- We petition.
- We Yield.

I've been using a five-fold pattern of praying for years. It helps me cover as many bases as possible.

We are all human and sometimes we need reminders to do what it seems like should be obvious. What do we want to say to God for all the blessings he's given us, for all the joy, for the sunshine, for the air we breathe? How about starting with a simple Thank you!

Worship in community each week and prayer 5 times a day. This is part of the path to a closer walk with God and a road to making ourselves a living Hallelujah.

Let us pray...

Lord, help us to see the beauty of this world. Help us to notice the blessings all around us. Help us to remember that you are God. Help us to trust that somehow you will see us through even the painful parts of life and bring good from them. Grant us a grateful heart. Help us be a living

hallelujah. In Jesus' name. Amen.