Welcome to the Journey

Staying healthy is not easy. We all need regular exercise to stay fit, whether it is physical, intellectual or spiritual. But if you are like me you probably have made loads of resolutions to go to the gym, eat better and read more. It is hard to change habits, but with a little determination, it is possible.

First, we need to identify what is keeping us from spiritual fitness. Then, replace this with good habits. If you keep up with your commitment, it will stick. Although, you can expect some bumps along the way.

I would like to invite you to join us as we explore five spiritual exercises that have helped Christians throughout the ages to cultivate a more joyful and life-giving relationship with God and neighbor.

Each exercise has an individual and communal component. Exercising regularly will not only strengthen your own your faith but also build up the life of your faith community.

Maybe you’ve been wanting to develop some good spiritual habits for some time. Now is the opportunity to explore how to pray, study, serve, give and share. And why not invite a friend to come along as well?

Building good habits is hard work. But your efforts will help you deepen your relationship with God and together we can be the church, be the change.

Enjoy. And God bless you on your journey.

+Mark
The Rt. Rev. Mark Van Koevering
VIII Bishop of Lexington
Bishop’s Welcome Film: https://vimeo.com/511753626

You can find all films and other resources for this class at: https://diolink.org/diolex/index.php/5-spiritual-exercises/

Session 1: Prayer

Prayer is the act of making time and space to speak with God, to listen to God, or to simply be with God. Prayer clears a pathway for God to enter our lives.¹

The Centrality of Prayer

Prayer is one of the most central features of the Christian life. It is so central to Episcopal life that the document which guides Episcopal practice is titled, The Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) contains an explanation of prayer in the form of questions and answers within a section called, The Catechism. Here is how it answers the question, What is prayer?:

Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words (BCP, 856).

Responding to God can take many forms. We can respond to God when we are alone with our individual intentions. We can also respond to God as a community when we gather for corporate prayer and worship.

Consistency is the Key

The key to prayer, as with cultivating all beneficial habits, is consistency. Anthropological research shows that people who pray regularly feel closer to God, are more joyful, and see God’s working in world in more heightened and complex ways.²

¹ Adapted from The Way of Love, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/pray/
Throughout the ages Christians have seen great value in praying every day. This idea is also central to Episcopal faith as *The Book of Common Prayer* begins by outlining a daily rhythm of prayers for individuals and/or communities at key moments of the day: morning, noon and night. Whether or not you chose to pray the *Daily Office*, as this rhythm is called, it is a good idea to try establish a daily prayer exercise.

In addition to individual prayer, from the very birth of Christianity, Christians have gathered each week to pray as a community. Of course, some weeks we will have to miss gathering with our community of faith, nonetheless, if we have a goal of meeting with the community each week we will cultivate a habit that will support us when we become discouraged, provide resiliency when our lives encounter struggle, and give us opportunities to serve God and encourage the faith of others in our community.

**Kay Scarborough Reflects on Prayer in Her Life**

We noted that prayer takes many forms—we can respond to God through words, actions, and silence. Kay Scarborough is a member of the community of faith at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Lexington. Let’s listen as she describes some of the ways she weaves patterns of prayer into her daily life.

Prayer Film: https://vimeo.com/504916147

Questions for Meditation and Discussion:

1. Kay describes prayer as “her time with God.” Do you set aside a regular time with God? If you do, what is it like?
2. Kay says that when she engages in prayer she tries to listen to God more than she talks. Are there ways that you try to listen to God? If so, how do you go about that?
3. Which of Kay’s prayer exercises was most interesting to you? Which exercise would you like to learn more about or integrate into your life?
4. Kay said that she believes that God does not require our prayers to be perfect. Rather, God knows what our intentions are and accepts our prayers on that basis. Is that a freeing thought for you? How does or would this thought be a help to you in your prayer life?
5. Kay mentioned that there were times in her life when she did not feel God’s presence. Have you experienced those times? What got you through or are you still experiencing that now?
6. The New Testament records many accounts of Jesus praying. One of them is before Jesus selected the twelve people who would become his inner group of apostles. Here is how St. Luke describes it: “Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor” (6:12-16 NRSV). What does this account teach us about prayer? How do you imagine the kinds of prayer Jesus engaged in that night on the mountain? How can this account inform and shape our prayer lives today?

Exercises to Build Healthy Habits of Prayer:

—**Pray five times per day.** This can be done in many different ways. For instance, morning and evening prayer with the Daily Office and prayers of thanksgiving at meal times. Or, when you first wake up, when you leave the house, at mid-day, when you arrive home, and when you go to bed.

—**Participate in corporate prayer once a week.** Having a goal of weekly attendance can help us feel closer to God and give us opportunities to bless others. It also is a time when we experience Christ in the Eucharist, communion with other Christians, hear God’s word, and prepare for the week ahead.

Resources for further study:

The Mission of St. Clare has a very handy website that puts together the prayers and readings of the Daily Office for each day: [https://www.missionstclare.com/english/](https://www.missionstclare.com/english/)

The Daily Office is also available as an app for your browser or mobile device: [https://dailyoffice.app](https://dailyoffice.app)
Session 2: Study

Your word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105 NRSV).

Knowing God on a Deeper Level

We can come to a general knowledge of an acquaintance through occasional conversations and intuitive senses of their character simply by being in their presence. St. Paul says this the case with God as well. All people have an innate knowledge of God whether they apprehend this on a conscious level or not (Romans 1:20).

Yet, in order to truly understand a person, we must listen to them and pay attention to the ways in which they move through the world. This is also true with our relationship with God.

Christians throughout the ages have believed that there are many ways we can gain a deeper understanding of God. Theologians have traditionally categorized these ways into two groups: general and special revelation.

General and Special Revelation

General revelation refers to the traces of God we can see in God’s creation—the ordering of the stars, the laws of physics, animal and plant life. Human beings, since they are God’s creation as well, reflect God in the ways we think, experience life, have a sense of right and wrong, and imitate God in our own acts of creation such as philosophical exploration, story-making, and artistic expression.

Special revelation refers to more focused and directly mediated knowledge of God. This includes the work of the Holy Spirit felt, perhaps, in gentle nudges of our consciences or sensations of divine leading (John 16:13). Special revelation also includes the Bible which, according to Episcopal tradition, was written by human authors who were moved or “inspired” by God to record the stories of the people of Israel (the Old Testament), Jesus (the New Testament Gospels), and the early church (New Testament Epistles and Writings). Christians throughout the ages believed that God still speaks to us through the Bible as we read it with prayerful attention.
Christians have traditionally believed that Jesus is the clearest and most definitive way God revealed the divine self to humanity. As St. John put it, Jesus is God’s word made flesh (John 1). To put it a different way, Jesus is God’s teaching about the divine self encapsulated within a human body. Since the New Testament Gospels provide the most detailed accounts of Jesus’ life and teachings, Christians have often regarded these books as particularly important for understanding who God is. This is one reason why the congregation typically stands when the Gospels are read within gathered worship.

As we said at the beginning of this session, in order to truly know someone, a person must listen to them and pay attention to the ways in which they move through the world.

Christian Brady Reflects on Study in His Life

Let’s hear from The Rev. Canon Dr. Christian Brady as he describes the ways he listens to God and pays attention to divine movements in this world through the exercise of prayerful study.

Study Film: https://vimeo.com/511745122

Questions for Meditation and Discussion:

1. Christian said that God speaks through all of creation. What are some of the ways you see traces of God or feel the divine presence in the natural world?
2. Christian talked about the potentially oppressive or narrow-minded nature of describing the Bible as “God’s word.” Have you experienced the Bible used in oppressive or exclusionary ways? How can we avoid using the Bible in ways that are hurtful?
3. Christian described the Bible as a thread that connects us to all the people of God today and those thousands of years in the past. Have you regarded the study of Scripture as an act of communal inclusion and connection? How can you foster this in your own life and in the life of your faith community?
4. Christian points out that the Bible reflects the real world that we live in. What biblical characters or situations most deeply resonate with you and your life?
5. Christian says that we should embrace the Bible as revealing deep truths about God and this world. He also says we should question the Bible and not merely accept things in it seemingly at face value. How do you see this tension working within your life of study and the life of the community of faith you are a part of?
6. With this tension in mind, how do you understand St. Paul’s teaching about Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:14-17: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (NRSV)?

Exercises to Build Healthy Habits of Study:

- Read at least five verses of Scripture per day and think about the ways they can apply to your life, what they teach you about God, or how they can shape your actions toward other people.
- Join a Bible study group. As Christian observed, the Bible was written for the benefit of the entire Christian community, not merely for individual edification. Studying the Bible in community can open us to new insights that we would not realize on our own.

Resources for further study:


The Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible—World-class scholars provide introductions to each book of the Old & New Testaments and Apocrypha.

Welcome to the Bible by Vicki Black and Peter Wenner—Provides a history of how the Bible came to be, how Anglicans interpret it, and methods for studying the Bible for spiritual nourishment.

Bible Odyssey—An online Bible dictionary written by biblical scholars affiliated with the Society of Biblical Literature.
Session 3: Serve

“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant...
just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26b, 28 NRSV).

Following Jesus into a Life of Service

St. John records one of the most powerful teaching demonstrations of Jesus entire ministry (John 13:1-20). The disciples had gathered around a table to eat with Jesus one last time. Just before the meal, Jesus got up and washed the disciple’s feet.

It was a selfless and others-serving thing to do. People in the ancient Mediterranean wore open sandals, and they walked through dusty streets that were often littered with trash and stained with sewage. When an individual of means arrived home, the person of lowest rank in the household would bring a water basin and towel to them, take their sandals off, and wash the grime from their feet so they didn’t bring disease and filth inside.

After Jesus dried the last of the disciples’ feet, this is what he said: “For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.”

Jesus teaches his disciples several things here. Among them are that all the followers of Jesus are on an equal plane. Every organization needs leaders, but no leader grades out of acts of service. Every disciple of Jesus shares a central calling—to serve those around them with acts of love. No one is exempt from this holy, joyous and difficult invitation. Many communities of faith remind themselves of this teaching each Maundy Thursday when the congregation liturgically washes each other’s feet.

God Works Primary Through People

In the Bible, the words serve, serving, service, and servant appear over a thousand times. From the first book of the Bible to the very last, humans are encouraged to live in ways that exhibit love of God and love of neighbor. This love is not merely a feeling. It includes concrete and tangible action.

The prophet Micah tells the people of his day the core expectation that God has for the people of God: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:6-8, NRSV).

The Bible is full of invitations for people to serve others in ways that foster justice, love and kindness. Records of God’s direct and miraculous intervention into the world are actual fairly rare. Rather, God expects that people will be the main agents of God’s love in this life and, as we are in faithful cooperation with God, to enact God’s will on Earth.

**Matthew Young Reflects on Service in His Life**

There are myriads of ways we can serve others. We can advocate for policy changes, teach others skills that we have, be a friend to a lonely person... Let’s listen to Father Matthew Young describe his calling to serve as a chaplain for first responders in Northern Kentucky and think about how we use his insights to discover our callings to serve.

Serve Film: [http://vimeo.com/504943118](http://vimeo.com/504943118)

Questions for Meditation and Discussion:

1. Father Matthew says the first step to service is to be present with someone else. What steps do you need to make to be able to be present with someone else? What does your community of faith need to do to make that possible?
2. Father Matthew says the second step to service to “be you,” to present your authentic and true self to others. Is this hard for you? How can you work to be more open and transparent as your serve others?
3. Father Matthew said, “If we want to know what would Jesus do, we need to ask the question: “What did Jesus do, who did he hang out with, what did he say–and do that!” How would you go about answering these questions and how could your answers inform your life of service?
4. Father Matthew says that a life of Christian service is one in which we join others and serve them on the same level. That requires a degree of vulnerability, both a stance of openness toward the other person and also openness to letting God transform and change us. Does this scare or excite you? How can you prepare yourself to serve in these ways?
5. Father Matthew says that it is not enough for us to be willing to serve someone else, we must also be willing to let others serve us. Is this easy or hard for you? What needs to change in your life to better enable others to serve you?

6. This is how the Letter to the Ephesians describes one of the main purposes for which humans were created: “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (2:10, NRSV). How does this inform your understanding of Christian service?

Exercises to Build Healthy Habits of Service:

— **Intentionally engage in five acts of service per week.** In your morning prayer, offer yourself to God in service and look for ways throughout the day to serve someone else. If we enacted five acts of service per week for fifty-two weeks that would equal 260 intentional acts of service each year. If every one of the 6,500 members of our diocese did this we would engage in 1,690,000 intentional acts of service per year!

— **Join a service ministry in your community of faith.** Perhaps your community works on a house for Habitat for Humanity, or has a food pantry, or tutors people in reading skills. Find a way to serve alongside others and, as Father Matthew says, be prepared for God to change you in wonderful ways!

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**Session 4: Gratitude & Generosity**

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35 NRSV).

**Created for Gratitude & Generosity**

God made an entire universe and then shared it. As Genesis poetically expresses it, when God formed human and animal life God breathed into their mouths the divine breath to animate them. God shared vitality and consciousness to bring life to other creatures. The act of creation itself reveals that God is generous.

God then invites us to follow in this creative act by generously sharing with others the things that we have been given.

**Following Jesus into the Joy of Gratitude & Generosity**
Jesus gave many teachings on generosity. One of them, if we understand it well, has the potential to bring us joy and gratitude. Within a series of teachings Jesus tells a crowd:

   Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back (Luke 6:38 NRSV).

As we learned from The Rev. Dr. Christian Brady in session 2, the Bible has often been used in authoritarian and abusive ways and this is certainly true for this passage. You may have heard televangelists use this passage in order to manipulate people into handing over their lifesavings in the vain hope that they would win the lottery or strike oil in their backyard.

What Jesus seems to mean is that, of course, the act of giving blesses the person who receives the gift, but the giver also experiences joy and a sense of purpose when they give. Why is this? Perhaps it is a natural result of how we were created to function? We were created in the image of a generous God. As we follow God into acts of generosity we experience joy as we are acting in ways we were created to be.

**Judy Junker Reflects on Gratitude & Generosity in Her Life**

Let’s hear from Sister Judy Junker as she describes the gratitude that fills her life and the way she and the members of the community of faith at St. James Prestonsburg generously share with others through their food pantry ministry.

Giving Film: https://vimeo.com/506278433

Questions for Meditation and Discussion:

1. Sister Judy said that the food pantry ministry has beneficially changed the reputation of St. James within the city of Prestonsburg. Why do you think that is?
2. Sister Judy is grateful for her “exciting life” and for the people that influenced her. What parts of your life are you grateful for? Which people have positively influenced you?
3. Sister Judy says that churches should know the needs of the people outside their doors. Furthermore, she says that it is not enough to invite people into our church buildings—we should go out into the world and meet people in their suffering. What can we do to better understand the needs of the communities around us? How can we participate more fully in outreach beyond the doors of our church buildings?
4. Sister Judy also says that when we as communities of faith become part of the larger communities we are situated in, we are able to participate in the good things that are happening. How can we as communities of faith participate in the good things that are going on in our communities?

5. Sister Judy said that many of the volunteers at the food pantry qualified for food assistance. They understood their needs, were grateful for the support they received, and then out of this gratefulness they were moved to generosity. No matter what our situation, we all depend on others in various ways. No one is self-sufficient. What are the ways you depend on others? How can that motivate you to generosity?

6. Read 1 John 3:16-17: “We know love by this, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” What does this passage reveal about calling at followers of Jesus? How can it inform your life of gratitude and generosity?

Exercises to Build Healthy Habits of Gratitude & Generosity:

- **Engage in five acts of generosity each month.** We often think of giving in terms of money and sometimes it is. But each person has facets of their entire being to offer to others. This could include our time in the form of listening to someone unload their distress or our skills and abilities which we could teach to others. We can join in with work that is already being done and help someone accomplish something they couldn’t achieve on their own.

- **Pledge to your faith community.** If you are a part of a faith community, join in with others to financially support its life of worship, mission, and ministry. If you are not currently able to do this, consider forming a plan that would eventually enable you to pledge.
Session 5: Share

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us”
(2 Corinthians 5:20 NRSV).

Sharing What You Love

Episcopalians often become anxious when we talk about evangelism. Perhaps you picture a semi-crazy person standing on a street corner with a bull horn and a sandwich board with flames drawn on it. That’s not the kind of evangelism Jesus invites us to.

Christians are not to be known as the people who follow Jesus out of fear or pain avoidance. Jesus says that love is the catalyst and attraction of the good news: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Sharing our faith is merely sharing with others what we love. It is not imposing our beliefs onto someone else. Just as we might tell a friend about our favorite fishing spot or recommend a book we enjoyed, sharing our faith is inviting people we care about to share in something that gives us meaning and joy.

TJ Azar and Sean Farrington Reflect on Sharing the Good News

Let’s hear from Mother TJ Azar, rector of Calvary Ashland, and Sean Farrington, a parishioner at Calvary, as they describe their joy of sharing the good news of Jesus with people outside the church.

Share Film: https://vimeo.com/504949567

Questions for Meditation and Discussion:

1. Sharing our faith does not have to be complicated. It is sharing with others the story of our life. Sean says that he tells people how his faith in Jesus has changed him as a person. What are the ways your faith has changed you?
2. Sean says he drops hints about his faith into conversations in hopes they open the door to a larger discussions. How could you subtly yet authentically refer to your faith in conversations?
3. Mother TJ said: “If you look, you will find opportunities to share your story each day.” She gives an example of someone telling you they are having a bad day and suggesting that you ask if you could pray for them. How can you prepare yourself to recognize these moments each day when we can share our faith?

4. Mother TJ says that many of us do not have well developed language of God-talk. This can make sharing our faith a bit uncomfortable. Mother TJ recommends that we practice telling our story. Take a few moment and think about how you might summarize your faith journey in one minute or less. If you feel comfortable, share your story with the group.

5. In the first couple centuries after Jesus’ death false rumors about Christians of often spread around society. For instance, one rumor mischaracterized Eucharists services and portrayed Christians as cannibals. Because of this people outside the church often had misconceptions of what following Jesus really meant. In this context, we read the words of 1 Peter 3:15-16: “Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear. This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ.” What commonalities do you see between misconceptions of Christianity in the early days of the church and today? How could 1 Peter 3:15-16 guide us as we share our faith?

Exercises to Build Healthy Habits of Sharing:

— **Invite five people to a church event over the next year.** Think of five people you know who are not connected to a community of faith. Maybe they are not interested in spirituality at all or maybe they are but fell out with their community. Pray for them over the next few months and look for opportunities to invite them to share in the faith community that is important to you.

— **Share your faith in person or through social media.** As Mother TJ says, sharing our faith doesn’t need to be done in ways that are flashy or overdone. We can tell people about our faith and invite them to share in it in ways that are respectful and appropriate. Think about how you can have spiritual conversations with people in your life or show your spiritual side in winsome ways on social media. It could be as easy as asking if you can pray for someone, posting about your Easter celebrations, or sharing a picture of the church building where you worship.
Next Steps

Congratulations, you’ve completed our study of 5 spiritual exercises that have guided Christians through the ages to a more joyous and resilient faith!

Now that you are acquainted with these exercises, here comes the fun part: applying these exercises to your life.

Here is a handy summary of some goals for each exercise:

• Pray five times per day and gather for corporate worship weekly
• Read five verse of the Bible per day and study the Bible in a small group
• Practice five acts of intentional kindness per week and join a service ministry in your community of faith
• Engage in five acts of generosity per month and pledge to your local community of faith
• Invite five people to a church event over the next year and share your faith in person or on social media

As with any new habit, changing our patterns of life can be challenging and we won’t always meet our goals. That’s okay, though, keep at it. One way to help you stick to your goals is to get a circle of holy friends around you that can help you stay encouraged and motivated to keep engaged with these exercises. You could start with asking some of the people you took this class with if they would be interested in forming an encouragement group or a Bible study.

And, why not invite others in your community of faith to engage in these exercises, too? You could offer this course as a special formation opportunity or embed it in programs you already have going.

If you would like to study these five spiritual exercises in more depth, you could look at Adam Hamilton’s book, The Walk, on which informed the structure of this class.

Know that as you engage in these spiritual exercises the Holy Spirit will be with you.

If you do not have a group of people to worship with and would like to connect with a community of faith near you, send us a message. And, please let us know what you thought of this course and how we can improve it in future. You can email us at formation@diolex.org.
Let us go forth in the name of Christ to Be the Church, Be the Change!