



ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

2024 Lenten Journey



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# PREFACE

**Rev. Kyle Reynolds**

**O**f all the most churchy words in the world, “discipleship” might be among the churchiest. It’s a phrase that is used regularly within the Christian community, but is almost never used in any other context. Whether you come from a progressive mainline church, or a conservative fundamentalist congregation, most every follower of Christ claims to be a disciple – or would at least say that they want to be one. Some of the last words that Jesus is reported to have said during his earthly ministry are called the Great Commission, in which he tells his closest friends that their task and life purpose is to “go and make disciples of all people.”

All of this is well and good, so long as you are clear about what a disciple is and what a disciple does. But if you lack that clarity, it quickly slips into the realm of jargon that does little to help anyone follow Jesus. Perhaps there was a time in your life where you thought you were clear about what a disciple was – but maybe now you question some of what you assumed before. Or maybe you’re new to the idea of faith, or newly trying to take your faith seriously, and a crash course on how a follower of Jesus shapes their life would be helpful. So, what does it look like to be a disciple?



Years before I had any thought of being a pastor here, I made my way to the building for an event that was being hosted at St. Paul's. I remember being struck by the prominence of Love, Seek, and Serve – from the sign along the road, to the wall right above the sanctuary entrance, to the way the pastor talked about the mission of St. Paul's. The simplicity and clarity of those three words stuck with me.

As I have grown to know St. Paul's more over the last year, there are two additional observations that have stuck with me. The first was learning the ways that Love, Seek, and Serve were reflected in St. Paul's budget and church leadership structure. Our financial documents are organized to reflect each of these foci as priorities, and we have teams for each of these areas. Leaders of these teams serve on our highest leadership board and help set the direction and the goals of the church. The second observation came as I participated in home gatherings during my first months at St. Paul's. I was surprised (ok – I was shocked, really) to find that most homes I went into had a Discipleship Pathway magnet proudly displayed on their fridge. How cool is that?! (pun definitely intended.) It was actually in a member's kitchen, looking at their magnet, that I learned for the first time that our Discipleship Pathway isn't just the three words, but that there are nine accompanying practices.

The Discipleship Pathway is St. Paul's answer to the question asked above: what does it look like to be a disciple? Under the headings of our mission statement (the full text reads: to **LOVE** God and all others unconditionally, to **SEEK** answers to our questions, and to **SERVE** God by

*servicing others*) are nine areas of focus to guide our journey of faith. While it is likely that you feel stronger in some of the areas than others, at St. Paul's we believe that each of these nine practices are essential for every person's faith.

In the pages of this book, you'll find reflections on each component of our Discipleship Pathway. Contributors include the current chairs of our Love, Seek, and Serve Teams, who share about what their teams do. And for each of the nine practices of the Discipleship Pathway, you will find reflections from clergy folks related to St. Paul's. Their ages, perspectives, and ministry contexts vary, but what they share is a familiarity with and an affinity for this church. Through their written words and the accompanying video interviews, I believe you will hear of their wisdom and their passion for the ministry that we share.

It is important to note that this book is presented as a beginning place for conversation, not as the end. The goal of these writings is not to provide definitive, declarative, or limiting understandings of these practices. Instead, the hope is to provide a springboard for your own reflection, for ongoing discussion, and ultimately for greater understanding of the discipleship journey. Each chapter includes a set of questions for your consideration and conversation, with a particular bent towards asking how you will incorporate each practice in your life.

This book is originally being shared as a part of Lent 2024 focus on the Discipleship Pathway. In the Church, Lent is traditionally a time of examination and preparation. Examination brings with it renewed focus and the invitation to see familiar things anew. Preparation is the holy art of

readying oneself and one's community for the future into which God leads. Our prayer is that these written reflections, the accompanying videos, our Sunday morning messages, and conversations you share in formal and informal small groups will assist your examination and preparation no matter when you encounter this resource. Our hope is that you will find ways to share with one another and with the leadership at St. Paul's your experience, understanding, and ideas for our future with the Discipleship Pathway, as we aim to let it shape our ministry more deeply.

To help mark your journey, we have also created a Discipleship Pathway Passport. We offer it to you with a challenge, to participate in each of these nine practices as you progress through these reflections. We have also provided a 40 Day Bible Reading Plan through Psalms, which can accompany you on this journey during Lent, or anytime you partake in it. You will find it in the Appendix on page 58...and if you follow along, you can add a stamp to your Passport!

Your pastors are praying with you and for you in this journey! We cannot wait to see what is learned, uncovered, and shared through this process, and trust that God's Spirit and grace will be a guide for you and us all. Please take time to ask questions, to push back, and to share epiphanies, celebrations, and all that you're learning with us.

Grace + Peace,  
Pastor Kyle  
Senior Pastor, St. Paul's United Methodist Church



# LOVE: INTRODUCTION

**Alice Wright, Love Team Chair**

**M**y husband Don and I first attended St. Paul's three years ago. I had been looking for a more inclusive and welcoming church close to our home. While waiting in line to vote, I picked up one of St. Paul's bookmarks and decided this was a church I wanted to try. It is always scary when you first go to a new place where you know no one. However, as soon as I entered St. Paul's that first Sunday, I immediately knew that I had found my people. The warm and sincere welcome I received from everyone made me feel like I really belonged, which is one of the reasons I feel strongly about the first discipleship practice under Love – “Worship Weekly.” As part of this practice, Love Team recruits greeters for services so everyone entering St. Paul's can feel welcomed and loved like Don and I did.

As Christians, we believe we are called to “LOVE God and ALL others unconditionally.” In addition to worshipping weekly, Love Team focuses on building deeper relationships through praying daily and sharing our faith stories. We ensure Sunday mornings go smoothly by finding volunteers to greet, usher, and serve the community. Daily prayer keeps us close to God. At St. Paul's, we can sign up to receive a weekly prayer email to pray alongside our church family, and submit prayer requests to the pastors or



community. On Thursdays, we can join Pastor Eric for midday prayers via Zoom. Love Team also helps people share their faith stories with others inside of St. Paul's and in the community. We participate in many community events each year to share the story of St. Paul's with others. And we host events within the church – like Fifth Sunday meals, game nights, Bingo, and more – so that we can more deeply connect to others within St. Paul's.

I'd love for you to connect with Love Team! We meet on Tuesday nights every other month. Or, if you'd like to hear more about Love Team, or would like to share ideas for ways we can better care for each other, I would love to talk with you. You can contact me at [love@stpaulslenexa.org](mailto:love@stpaulslenexa.org).





## CHAPTER 1

# LOVE: WORSHIP WEEKLY

**Rev. Paul Babcock**

**Scripture:** Luke 4:14-21

**I**n this passage from Luke 4, Jesus has recently had his experience in the wilderness where he fasted, prayed, faced temptation and prepared for what was to come for him. Strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit, he begins teaching in the synagogues in Galilee. He even goes to Nazareth, the town where he was raised, and to the synagogue there. As Luke describes the scene for us, Jesus clearly states what his agenda is going to be, what his goals are, what it is he wants to accomplish.

In the context of that, we are also told in verse 16, “he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom” (NRSV). Jesus worshiped! He worshiped publicly and regularly on the Sabbath. We also know he worshiped privately, as often as he could.

I am retired now, but when I was a pastor in churches, one of my duties was to teach Confirmation class to middle school students. I often used the method of asking questions, explaining that there were not necessarily any

right or wrong answers, asking the students to share what they think.

However, there was one question that did have a correct answer. The question was, "What is the most important thing that people of faith do?" I usually received several answers: kindness, mission, caring for others, doing what is right, etc. Those are all important and necessary.

But, I tried to teach my students that the most important thing we can do is worship. Our worship might take various forms. Indeed, kindness and acts of mission or caring for others or doing what is right can be acts of worship. Prayer, even as simple as "Thank you, God," is an act of worship.

Worship is that and something else. Worship is adoration and praise of our living, loving God, who creates, saves and redeems us, and brings us into the strength of fellowship with God's Holy Spirit and others. To publicly worship is to sing God's praises, to pray, to listen, to contemplate the holiness of God, and to learn to live the life of faith and holiness in our everyday lives. Worship draws each of us, all of us, into a transforming relationship with that living, loving God.

John Wesley is the person largely credited with beginning what was known as the Methodist movement, which later gave birth to the United Methodist Church. "Worship," said Wesley, "brings us into the presence of God" (The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 1). Wesley encouraged the people called Methodist to worship publicly, and regularly, so that all may be strengthened. The United Methodist Church still encourages this: "The personal experience of faith is

nourished by the worshipping community” (The Book of Discipline, 2016; section on Our Doctrinal Heritage, pg. 54). And, “We believe divine worship is the duty and privilege of [each] who, in the presence of God, bows in adoration, humility and dedication. We believe divine worship is essential to the life of the Church, and that the assembling of the people of God for such worship is necessary to Christian fellowship and spiritual growth” (The Book of Discipline, 2016; section on Our Doctrinal Standards, Article XII, pg. 76).

In worship, Christ makes known to us the love of God that is abundantly poured out for us and to us. As others worship with us, we experience and realize this love together, seek to live this love together, and God is praised. This is worship.

I mentioned that I am now retired. When I retired, people I had known for years asked me if I missed the ministry. The answer was no, I did not miss administration, meetings, disappointments of various kinds, etc. I did know though, that my faith called me to worship. So I did. When I retired it was at the height of the COVID pandemic, but my wife and I still worshiped, even online. Most recently, as I had that disease, and as my wife recovered from surgery, and as the temperatures plummeted in January, we worshiped online again. My preference is to be in the same room where worship happens, with others, so that I can experience that with those others and be strengthened by that fellowship. But our technology gives us an acceptable alternative. As I worship online, I know that others are, too.

Jesus of Nazareth “went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.” As we follow him, we are challenged to follow that custom, and worship, regularly, with others. So may it be!

**Reflection questions:**

- Do you consider public and regular worship a discipline? Do you practice it? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that the presence of other worshipers strengthens your practice of worship and your faith? Why or why not?
- How do personal and online worship experiences complement gathered worship, and how does public worship have a function that individual worship cannot fulfill?
- What is the most meaningful or helpful part of worship for you?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice weekly worship?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul’s community could grow in the practice of worshipping weekly?





## CHAPTER 2

# LOVE: PRAY DAILY

**Rev. Jan Rhind with Reflections by Rev. Eric Vogt**

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

**O**ur scripture reading comes from the first letter that Paul wrote. It actually was written before any of the gospels had been written. He wrote it to folks, some Jews, some Gentiles, in Thessalonica in the Roman province of Macedonia, who had heard him preach and talk about Jesus and had converted to being followers. At the conclusion of the letter, he urges them to pray.

It's good advice! It is so good that a preacher could get three sermons out of it. But it is the "pray without ceasing" that I am focusing on. Whatever does that mean? How in the world is it possible to do that? Unless one has dedicated themselves to a monastic life of prayer, this seems impossible to do. So, I want to share my take on this.

First of all, I am a very pragmatic, practical person. I don't spend much time at all doing what most would consider prayer. I've tried contemplative prayer. I've tried meditation. I've tried guided prayer. I rather envy those for whom these ways of prayer have great meaning. They are not for me. I

do spend maybe five minutes a day in intentional prayer, mostly intercessory prayer for those on my prayer list. It usually happens at the end of the day. I don't light a candle or have a special prayer center or place. I simply call to mind each person or situation, briefly envision each one, and "hold" them in my mind for a few seconds or so. God knows each need so I don't bother explaining why they are included in the prayer. They just are. Some are in this prayer time for a few days, others have been there for years. Some are people I know, others are people I have never met, though I know of them.

That brings me to praying without ceasing. For me, that means that as I go through each day, if someone or some situation comes to mind, I hold it for just a second or so - and I consider that to be prayer. I don't cease doing what I am about but the very thought is prayer. Have you ever had someone just randomly pop into your mind? I'm sure you have. For me, that is a form of prayer. Sometimes I act on that thought and perhaps call or text or email them.

To pray without ceasing thus means two things for me: (1) I don't have to cease, or stop, what I am doing in order to pray, and (2) prayer is always with me as I go through my day, prayer without ceasing. I hope you can see the difference. I also encourage you to pray - in whatever manner works for you. Do explore differing types of prayer, but remember that the ultimate goal of prayer is communication with God and awareness of God in all of life. May your prayer life be a blessing to you. See the reflection questions following a few practical suggestions.

**Reflections from Pastor Eric:** There are many ways to pray - have you found a prayer practice that works for you? Following are several examples that might be helpful. Now is a great time to experiment with different kinds of prayer. Share what you learn about what works for you (and what hasn't) with a small group.

Try lifting up a quick prayer alongside other things you do regularly: before each meal, or when you're washing your hands or brushing your teeth. I have tried praying before I send each email (sometimes helps with editing too!), or each time I walk through a door.

If you're interested in trying fixed-hour prayer, with written liturgy for prayers in the morning, mid-day, and evening, there are lots of great resources like:

- *Common Prayer* by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro (portions are free at [commonprayer.net](http://commonprayer.net))
- *Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle
- *The Methodist Book of Daily Prayer* is new from Matt Miofsky

Email Pastor Eric ([eric@stpaulslenexa.org](mailto:eric@stpaulslenexa.org)) and ask to receive the weekly prayer guide that goes out on Thursdays. Currently about 200 people at St. Paul's receive it and have the opportunity to pray through needs in our church, community, and world.



Try a gratitude journal, writing out 1-3 things you're thankful for each day, and saying a simple "Thank you, God!" for each one.

A prayer of examen can help you walk through your day with God. Check out the free app "Reimagining the Examen" based on the book by Mark Thibodeaux, with a variety of daily guides to help you "Relish, Request, Review, Repent, Resolve."

Other free apps that may help include: Centering Prayer, Pray as You Go, and Lectio 365, the last of which incorporates the practice of praying through Scripture known as lectio divina.

The Psalms were a prayerbook for Jesus and have been a way for the people to express honest emotions with God for thousands of years. Try praying through the daily Bible reading plan in Psalms, found in the Appendix on page 58.

Have you heard of the "5-finger" method for prayer? Each finger represents a direction for your prayers:

- Thumb – thanksgiving: where do you want to thank God and give God a "thumbs up"?
- Index – praise: how can you communicate your love and need for God, whatever your circumstances?
- Middle – confession: how do you need forgiveness from God and others? Where do you need to extend forgiveness?

- Ring – petition: ask for God’s help for yourself, your family or household of whatever shape, your church family and co-workers and our leaders and others.
- Pinky – yielding: now that your hand is completely open, ask how you can more fully offer yourself to God and others today, and invite God to use you in God’s mission of mending the whole world.

From Richard Foster's book *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*:

*Dear Jesus, how desperately I need to learn to pray. And yet when I am honest, I know that I often do not even want to pray. I am distracted. I am stubborn. I am self-centered.*

*In your mercy, Jesus, bring my "want-er" more in line with my "need-er" so that I can come to want what I need. In your name and for your sake, I pray. Amen.*

### **Reflection questions:**

- Have there been particular seasons in which prayer has been especially meaningful or important to you?
- What is your response to Paul’s imperative to “prayer without ceasing,” and to Jan’s take on that idea?
- Do you find a particular prayer practice, or a type or way of praying, to be helpful? Have there been at times in the past? If you would like to grow in your prayer life, what prayer practice might you explore?

- Does praying daily impact the way you experience the world?
- Is there someone in your life that you believe has modeled a particularly faithful prayer life? What stands out to you about them?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice daily prayer?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of daily prayer?





## CHAPTER 3

# LOVE: SHARE YOUR FAITH STORY

**Rev. John Ellington**

**Scripture:** Luke 10:29-37

### **From the Ditch to the Inn, or, From the Closet to Life**

**T**his parable from Luke could be the story of my spiritual journey. Both the man in the ditch and myself in the closet began our stories isolated and in need of compassion and care. We both were injured: one physically, the other mentally.

Our text is a familiar story. A lawyer wants to trick Jesus, and asks who his neighbor is. Jesus responds with a story of a man left beaten in a ditch. Three people pass by; two ignore him, but the third one shows compassion. The third passerby is a despised Samaritan, but he takes the injured man to an inn, and pays the innkeeper to nurse him back to health.

My long faith journey begins as an outsider; shunned, I had to keep my true self in the closet, or the ditch. Even before I had a real understanding of what it meant, I somehow knew I was different because I was attracted to my boyhood

friends in some way I did not understand. As I grew older, I began to realize I liked my friend in a sexual way, not just as friends. The thought of being caught scared me to death – so I moved not one inch out of that dark closet society put me in. What was I supposed to do? Things got worse in junior high and high school. As Sir Walter Scott says, “oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.” But something told me it will all be okay, no date set, but all will be well.

My family moved to California, but things were not much better because I began to internalize my homophobia. When I returned to the Church, it was more progressive – in the “don’t ask, don’t tell...don’t even think about it” kind of way. In school, I began to go along with the gym jokes about gay people, even telling my own sometimes. All the while I was pushing my real self further inside. Going to college was somewhat freer, but I wasn’t even willing to come out to my close friends. I attended chapel, still hoping I could change into a straight person.

Finally, I graduated and went into theater, joining a professional company in Southern California. Following my audition, the Artistic Director mentioned how proud he was that our company was the straightest among many theaters – which only served to shove me back in the closet. I recovered from the shock of his statement and remained with that company for twenty-five seasons.

Over that time, I started coming out to one person at a time. The first person I told was a friend and mentor. It took me a while, but I decided I’d had enough of this hiding. I said, “I

have to tell you something. I am gay.” His response was, “is that all? It’s okay here. We care about your acting abilities and your desire to work at your craft.”

Epiphany! I immediately felt things were going to be ok. They were. Soon I found a wonderful church where same sex couples held hands and put their arms around each other. As great as it was, old feelings returned. I was seeing it; the problem was believing that I was ok. But God began speaking to me at that moment of shock, as God usually does. And, in my discomfort, I began to feel like I found a home.

The years I spent at that church and in the theater helped me grow in love. I felt that people cared about who I was as a gay man – or, to put it better, a man who happened to be gay. I still wrestled; God’s epiphanies can take a lifetime. But I continued my acting and attending church and grew to know people who were committed to God and each other. They encouraged me to talk with others about who I was – and I began to take off the mask and come out of the closet.

I began to sense a call in the church, perhaps to share my story as a pastor. The church’s Associate Pastor told me that my ministry could be truly healing for myself, for other gay people, and for their families. So I went to Claremont School of Theology, worked in the United Church of Christ, and eventually led a church in Los Alamitos. While I was there, I was ordained, which is an amazing thought! I preached about Jesus’ justice and compassion and how everyone is invited to the table.

I was climbing out of the ditch and out of the closet, into the inn. And then things changed; I became the Samaritan who cared for myself and others. I became the one who stopped and attended to those who may be in the ditch or the closet; I shared the unexpected love of God and brought others to the inn to be nursed back to health. I wasn't perfect; I am not perfect. But I was ok, and knew I was loved by God.

When I came to Kansas City after retirement I continued a different ministry, using drama and storytelling to share the unconditional love of God through Jesus – who told the best stories ever. I then became the Samaritan again as I cared for my parents almost 24/7, until my mom's death in August of 2023.

There is hope because God is with us. God was with me in my story, and I think we can each find God in our own stories – whether we are gay, straight, or whatever God lovingly created us to be. So tell your story by living it. It will be filled with the best comedy and drama ever. Find that loving person within you. Invite others to your table and see how joyous storytelling can be. Go into the world knowing your story is of value, and that God is with you in every step of the journey.

### **Reflection questions:**

- John does a great job of locating himself in the story of the Good Samaritan. In that story, which character do you identify with? Have you had an experience like the person in the ditch – physically or mentally? Have there been times when you have treated others like the

priest? Have you been the Samaritan? When have you acted like the lawyer?

- In your life, how has God been present in moments where you felt isolated and alone, in need of care and compassion?
- How could your story be healing to someone else?
- Who are the outsiders in your life or community that need to be brought to the inn? Please put this in the context of your experience with LGBTQ+ persons, even if you have not been directly involved.
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice sharing your faith story?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of sharing faith stories?





# SEEK: INTRODUCTION



**Kim Romary, Seek Team Chair**

It is my honor to lead St. Paul's Seek Team! As a team, we support the Discipleship Pathway by focusing on the practices of joining a small group, seeking justice, and reading the Bible daily. We endeavor to learn from within and beyond our church community!

As I look back at my own faith journey, I have especially grown through several small groups. The time invested and relationships built have helped shape me in significant ways. And that inspires me to want to provide the same opportunities for others. In fact, in my story, it was joining a short-term Bible study that made St. Paul's truly "home" for me. I already loved so much about this church, but that experience helped me to make the connections that are always critical for our growth.

At St. Paul's, we take the work of seeking justice seriously. To do so requires us to be open and willing to take on new ideas and perspectives. Seek Team provides opportunities for St. Paul's to learn from people within our congregation, and from outside speakers, as we try to gain understanding about justice issues today. We also love reading the scriptures. Church-wide Bible Reading Plans are shared several times a year. They help us stay connected to others

in our community and grow in our understanding and experience of faith.

Anytime is a good time to SEEK answers to our question – but Lent is an especially great time. Don't we tell children that asking questions is how we learn? The same goes for us all! The short-term Lenten groups are a wonderful way to "get your feet wet" and maybe find some of the answers you've been seeking. They may also inspire more questions, and that's ok, too! Instead of giving something up for Lent, perhaps commit to following the daily Bible reading plan. That's the route I plan to go this year; instead of giving up chocolate, I'm going to spend time intentionally seeking God each day. Those around me will probably appreciate it much more, too.

Seek Team meets every other month on Tuesday evenings. If you want to know more about Seek Team, please reach out to me at [seek@stpaulslenexa.org](mailto:seek@stpaulslenexa.org).



## CHAPTER 4

# SEEK: JOIN A SMALL GROUP

**Rev. Claudia Ricks Hubbard**

**Scripture:** Hebrews 10:24-25

**I**n the beginning God created and ordered many things, pronouncing them all “good.” In the Genesis story, the last thing created was humankind. Enlivening them with God’s very breath, God pronounced humankind “very good.” From the beginning, the scriptures make clear that humankind was created to be in relationship. Relationship with God, one another, and all of creation is something humankind yearns for. It is also a sacred responsibility that has never been more critical than now, when folks have a deep sense of brokenness both individually and communally. Seeking to understand and live faithfully in these times is something we must do.

Amid the challenging realities of the world, small groups can serve many purposes. They seek to learn together in ways that guide understanding of how to faithfully live in the complicated and messy world. Often formed around the study of a particular subject, small groups take on discussions of a wide variety of topics, from Bible studies to social justice issues. Participants learn that it is okay, even imperative, to ask questions, to struggle with concepts we

learned and assumed to be true, and to accept the challenge of new ways of seeing and understanding. Sharing the gift of curiosity, members of small groups draw on the rich resources of learning from scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. They are encouraged to study and explore what it means to be humans created in the image of God, living in a complex world that is ever changing.

Throughout history and across religious traditions, one of the ways to resist the sense of brokenness and vulnerability in the world has been to engage in practices where caring for one another is understood as a sacred responsibility. This is not easy work. In fact, it requires courage, because this work requires that we really see one another and dare to engage with what folks bring - grief, hardships, pain, AND joys.

In our Methodist tradition, our founder John Wesley strongly encouraged folks to meet in small groups. The key question in those regular meetings was “how is it with your soul?” Although we usually do not ask the question in the same way, small groups provide safe places where folks can live out the holy work of seeking to truly know one another. Members of a group tenderly and carefully walk with one another in ways that demonstrate no one walks alone, that all are seen, and that others care. It takes courage to show up for others and dare to learn who they are; to come to know them in ways that honestly bear witness to what is unfolding in their lives.

One of the gifts of a small group is the presence of those who, over time, have come to know and love one another.

Those who will not turn away from the pain of another, who will gently help to hold and affirm the pain. In the face of the pain of others, folks often experience their own sense of vulnerability and yet they show up anyway! They show up to sit in silence, to share tears, to bring a meal, to hold a hand, to be prayerfully present. They come to listen, to share memories, stories, and hope. There is a Yiddish word, *hutzpah*, which means “holy audacity.” Folks who have the courage to show up in the messiness of life’s pain come with *hutzpah*, knowing that showing up is what we are called to do, and that we are all bound together in the bond of life, and that there are times when the hardest work is simply to not look away.

So often we speak of sharing in pain and loss. Part of the power of a small group is also sharing in times of joy. In moments of celebration - births, graduations, piano recitals, concerts, reunions, accomplishing a goal - the list goes on and on for times of celebration. Also, there are those wonderful, simple, extraordinarily ordinary moments - the first signs of spring, the smile of a loved one, the smell of baking bread - again, the list goes on and on. But how awesome to have folks with whom to share such joy!

The work of sharing one’s vulnerability is a mutual act. Some days you will be the one helping to cradle another’s pain, grief, loss, or joy. Other days you will be the one who needs others who will stand close - not to make the pain go away, but to reach out with strength that you can trust and lean into. In these ways the God-given gift of connection can be known. And in those connections hope is experienced. So “let us not neglect to meet together...but

encourage one another,” as the writer of Hebrews implores us. And “let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.” Small groups can be avenues of such beautiful and important connection and hope.

### **Reflection questions:**

- Who are the people you feel most comfortable being vulnerable with? With whom do you share your struggles and your joys?
- Human beings are made for connection. Beyond family and formal small groups, where do you feel most connected to others? Where do you wish you could experience deeper connection?
- What is the most meaningful small group experience you’ve been a part of? How do courageous vulnerability and bold hutzpah help deeper connections to form?
- Small groups can take many forms and functions. What might a life-giving group look like for you in this season of your life? Who could you share this idea with?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice small group participation?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul’s community could grow deeper in the practice of small groups?



## CHAPTER 5

# SEEK: SEEK JUSTICE

**Luke Miltz, Certified Candidate for Ordained Ministry**

**Scripture:** Acts 8:26-31

**H**ello! I've been a member at St. Paul's since July of 2019. You might remember me from when I served on staff at St. Paul's as the Community Engagement Coordinator. In this role, I had the joy of working with Love Council to welcome neighbors to our congregation, and to support Serve Council as they equipped the congregation to make an impact in our community.

...or, you might not have met me yet, because for the last year, I've lived in Chicagoland. I'm earning my Master of Divinity at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. During my program, I've given time and space to explore theology related to all sorts of issues. Grounded in our Discipleship Pathway at St. Paul's, I've answered a call to "seek justice" in the form of interfaith engagement.

The scripture that inspires this calling most in me is the story of Philip and the Ethiopian man in Acts 8:26-31.

You might have heard this passage from the pulpit during a sermon on baptism, or on inclusion in the church, both of which can be entirely appropriate. Another dimension of this scripture is its call for interfaith and intercultural engagement. It feels important to me to call particular attention to one part of this story. As the scripture continues, the next scene of the story tells of the Ethiopian eunuch being baptized. What we should be clear about, though, in the context of this reflection is that baptism is not the goal of interfaith engagement. So let's dive deeper into the part of the story we are focusing on.

One of Christ's disciples, Philip, upon being sent out to preach the gospel, comes across an Ethiopian man who is a eunuch. This meeting comes in the very early days of the Church, when what it meant to be a Christian was still being distinguished from the Judaism practiced by Jesus, the Disciples and their community. As an Ethiopian, the man is not a descendant of Israel, and is therefore outside the Jewish community. Even though biblical Ethiopia is not the nation we think of in the present-day, the stranger in the carriage is still located far from Judaism in a geographic sense. Still, Philip is called out of his comfort zone to "go over to this chariot and join" the stranger. The Ethiopian man is reading a text from the Hebrew Bible, with which Philip would have been familiar, and to which Philip would bring his Christian perspective. Likewise, the Ethiopian brings his various perspectives as an outsider in terms of culture, religion, and gender. God's call is for Philip to sit beside him and listen so the two can learn from one another, together.



To me, this is “seeking justice.” Learning about the cultures and religions of our neighbors helps us love them well. Listening to and learning from our neighbors of different faiths, gives them the authority to share their truth.

When you honor the traditions of your Jewish neighbors as foundational to our Christian faith and foundational in the life and teachings of Jesus, you are disrupting the injustice of Christian supremacy and seeking justice.

When you push back against someone who makes a blanket statement about all Muslims being terrorists, you are disrupting the injustice of racism and Islamophobia and seeking justice.

When you legitimize the goodness of your neighbors who don't believe in any God (but still work for a better future), you are disrupting the injustice of identity erasure and seeking justice.

When someone you know, who is not of native descent, talks about saging their home or wears indigenous patterns or regalia, politely pointing out their cultural appropriation disrupts the injustice of colonialism and seeks justice.

You can probably think of so many more examples of this important work that you are already doing in your daily life! In the context of your journey on the Discipleship Pathway, it is important to name the work of seeking justice.

The important work won't always feel easy or natural, though. Part of the reason that seeking justice is a challenge is because it will require us to adopt a posture of

openness. And it will often require us to move into spaces that are uncomfortable for us - as Philip is called to do in our scripture today. He enters into the space of someone who has been deemed an outsider, and it is there that community and transformation take place.

When we seek justice, we are invited to suspend our certainty, choosing instead to approach the world, our neighbors, and even our own internalized assumptions with a posture of curiosity. We are invited to listen - even before we ask questions, as sometimes our questions can betray agendas, assumptions, and steer conversation. Seeking justice invites us to approach others without a set agenda.

The work is challenging, but the witness of Philip, and of our scriptures over and over again, is not only that it is important work - but that it is good and holy work.

### **Reflection questions:**

- When did you most recently go out of your way to learn about a different culture? When has learning about a justice issue moved you to action and to practicing justice?
- Is there a particular community or justice issue that you feel called to learn about?
- Are there people that you think embody the practice of seeking justice especially well? What about their actions inspires you?

- Philip nurtures the faith of the eunuch. St. Paul's has nurtured the faith of people like Luke. How can you help nurture the faith of others in your life?
- As you continue in your discipleship journey, how will you participate in seeking justice?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of seeking justice?





## CHAPTER 6

# SEEK: READ THE BIBLE DAILY

**Rev. Marilyn Gregory**

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:1-9

**Prayer:**

Almighty God,  
When we read the Bible  
let us be so attentive  
that we hear your Word in the words we read.  
And keep us from being 'hearers of the Word' alone.  
Call us and shape us as 'doers of your Word,'  
we pray in the name of Jesus, your Word in our midst.  
Amen.

**A** confession: I have not and do not, now, read the Bible daily. I am not a well-disciplined person. There is not much that I do daily. I have a friend who reads two chapters from the Hebrew scriptures, one psalm, and one chapter from the New Testament every day. I admire his discipline, but I don't follow it.

I do believe it is important that we come to the Bible regularly and faithfully.

Throughout my years as a pastor in United Methodist congregations, I have been privileged to regularly meet with other people to read and discuss the Bible. The people who joined me in these discussions have been essential to my ministry.

**What kind of book is the Bible?** Barbara Brown Taylor writes: “The Bible tells us the stories we need and want to hear...stories to help us live, stories to help us die, and stories to help us believe we shall live again. Listening to them, we are called into relationship with the One who tells them to us. Believing them, we are changed. The living words of God heal our hurts and soften our hearts; they clear our vision and guide our feet. Like a lifeline strung from the beginning of time to the end, they show us a way through all the storms of culture, nature, and history. They show us the way to the Word beyond all our words, in whose presence we shall be made eloquent at last.” (Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, c 1993 Crowley Publications, p. 62)

Marcus Borg: “I see the Bible as a human response to God. Rather than seeing God as scripture’s ultimate author, I see the Bible as the response of these two ancient communities (Israel and Christianity) to their experience of God. As such, it contains their stories of God, their perceptions of God’s character and will, their prayers to and praise of God, their perceptions of the human condition and the paths of deliverance, their religious and ethical practices, and their understanding of what faithfulness to God involves.”

Marcus Borg, again: "To be Christian means to live within the world created by the Bible. We are to listen to it well and let its central stories shape our vision of God, our identity, and our sense of what faithfulness to God means. It is to shape our imagination, that part of our psyches in which our foundational images of reality and life reside. We are to be a community shaped by scripture. The purpose of our continuing dialogue with the Bible as sacred scripture is nothing less than that." (Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, c 2001 Harper San Francisco, p.22-23)

**How to read the Bible:** Dr. Bill Power and Marjorie Power proposed a pattern for taking the scriptures seriously without taking them literally; a pattern for submitting our lives to the shaping authority of the scriptures. I have found it useful with small groups and in my own private reading.

- Begin with prayer.
- Pick a pericope, a passage, a story. Do not isolate a verse from its context.
- Read it. Read it out loud. Read it silently. Read it from another translation.
- Read it in community...read the commentaries, study notes, talk with others. Make sure you understand the setting, the word meanings, the culture, etc.
- Imagine...
  - ❖ What does the story look like? What color is the story?

- ❖ What does the story sound, smell, feel, and taste like?
- Where/who are you in the story?
- What does this story tell you...
  - ❖ ...about God?
  - ❖ ...about the human creature?
  - ❖ ...about our relationship to God?
  - ❖ ...about our relationships with one another?
- What will you do because of this story?
- Conclude with prayer.

**Suggested practice:** Reread Matthew 13:1-9 and consider its purpose. This parable is rich with meaning. It may be a parable about soils; a parable that asks if we are good and fertile soil for the word of God. It may be a parable of our work as disciples. We will sow seed, some of which will never take root, but some of which will produce abundant fruit. It may be a parable about God's nature; about a God who sows the seeds of God's love with abandon, even on the hard path or among weeds.

Or today, it may be a parable about our ability to hear God's word. Not every story or every passage or every parable will speak to us. But if we regularly and faithfully come to a study of the Bible, we will be changed. Some seed will take root. We will become more like the people God created us to be.

## **Reflection questions:**

- Have you participated in, or do you now participate in, a small group focused on Bible study? In what ways was or is that experience helpful or fruitful? Do you read the Bible daily? What has been your experience of that practice?
- Which of the three statements from Barbara Brown Taylor and Marcus Borg ring true for you? Why?
- For you, what kind of book is the Bible?
- Do you find in Powers' pattern for Bible study any new or helpful ideas? The Powers believe that Bible study should move a person to do "the will of God." In what ways has Bible study has shaped your life?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice daily Bible reading?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of daily Bible reading?

Make sure to check out the Bible Reading Plan, included in the Appendix on page 58 of this booklet. There you will find a journey through the Psalms, along with questions for reflection on each day's reading.





# SERVE: INTRODUCTION



**Amy Rhodes, Serve Team Chair**

**S**erving at St. Paul's has allowed me to see faith in action in a multitude of ways. I became involved with Serve Team after helping organize Servant Sunday, an event that evolved into Serve Week after the pandemic. Through that work, I began attending Serve meetings and learning about the diversity of causes and organizations St. Paul's supports. One of the most impactful Serve opportunities for me has been becoming a weekly volunteer at The Hub's Community Market. There I have learned so much about hospitality, generosity, and celebrating each person's gifts.

On Serve Team, we corporately use the Discipleship Pathway to help us focus our work. We serve the community through volunteer opportunities with our partner organizations, First Sunday Food Drives, quarterly blood drives, and St. Paul's Garden. We practice justice by partnering with Kansas Interfaith Action (KIFA), Faith Voices for Medicaid Expansion, encouraging voter engagement, and justice opportunities through the Great Plains Conference. We also give generously by distributing funds from the church's annual budget and helping decide the recipients of Easter and Christmas offerings. Each quarter, St. Paul's gives to Cross-Lines, Shawnee Community

Services, The Hub Argentine, Reconciling Ministries Network, and KIFA.

We also have flexible funds we distribute throughout the year as a response to both international and domestic needs. These three practices of serving the community, practicing justice, and giving generously help us center our efforts to SERVE God by serving others.

Serve Team meets every other month after 11:00am worship. All are invited to share their ideas, gifts, and experiences. For more information, email me at [serve@stpaulslenexa.org](mailto:serve@stpaulslenexa.org).



## CHAPTER 7

# SERVE: SERVE THE COMMUNITY



**Rev. Mike Marcus**

**Scripture:** Genesis 45:1-8

**L**et's walk with Joseph for a moment. As a young man, he was betrayed and sold into slavery by his own brothers. Imagine the mix of fear, anger, and confusion he must have felt. Yet, through all his trials – from being a slave to becoming a prisoner, and eventually rising to power in Egypt – there is the constant (albeit seemingly silent) presence of God. It's like watching a play where you only realize in the final scenes that a key character was influencing the plot all along.

Think about when we step out to serve our community. We start with a heart full of good intentions. Joseph, for his faults, generally has good intentions. But it isn't always smooth sailing, is it? We might encounter pushback or skepticism. It's in these moments that our story aligns with Joseph's story. The resistance we meet often isn't a stop sign; it's more of a detour sign, perhaps guiding us to a path we hadn't considered, one that might be more collaborative and inclusive. Listening is the key. As Joseph listened to dreams, and listened to the realities of his situation, it shaped his responses and actions.

Joseph's realization of God's presence in his life came much later, and it's strikingly similar to our own experiences.

Often, it's only when we look back at our journey of serving others that we recognize the invisible hand of God guiding us. It's in the rearview mirror that we might understand the bigger picture of what has brought us to the place we are.

When the Autism Support Group that we host at St. Paul's began, it wasn't part of any original plan. At the time, it grew as we listened and shared life with a neurodiverse community. We became aware of a need that was not being met, and a new ministry was born. It's a beautiful example of "serving with" rather than "serving for." Just like Joseph, who didn't impose solutions but worked collaboratively to save Egypt and his family from famine, we learned to serve by listening and responding to the needs around us.

Now, let's circle back to our guiding scripture. When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, it's not just a family reunion; we see the way that the fabric of God's story is interwoven with the struggles and strife we face as humans. In those moments of joy and reconciliation, Joseph understands that his journey, filled with pain and separation, was not in vain. It was part of a larger narrative, one that only God could author. While God does not inflict the suffering Joseph experienced, God is present through it, transforming trials into a tapestry of growth and purpose, affirming that in our deepest challenges lies the potential for profound meaning and transformation. I often use the phrase "Mutual Transformation." When it comes to "serving the community," this means the journey of growth for both the one who serves, and for those who are being served.

I work at Reconciliation Services, and I hear stories like this every day. Stories of hope rising from ashes; an understanding that collaboration and community triumph over rugged individualism and fear. By making space to allow client guests to come together, access resources that have been historically withheld, and receive therapeutic guidance and reflection through a variety of modalities, we can see individuals' lives transformed.

Renee is one example. She came to Reconciliation Services to participate in a pilot program we developed. The program invited neighbors to come together, participate in intensive group and individual therapy, and receive a financial stipend as they worked to replant their lives in new, fertile soil. Renee was one of three who graduated from that program. Prior to her time in the program, she had never had a bank account, a car, or a steady job. After a few months, she had all of those things, and a new apartment she was able to call her own. By bringing together members of our community to rally around our neighbors at 31st and Troost, lives were transformed.

Serving a community means being part of a community. We at Reconciliation Services learned from Renee's experience, too. We learned that the way many of us might be accustomed to doing things - like taking a class with a syllabus, a schedule, and a whole semester's worth of activities - doesn't necessarily work for those experiencing generational poverty and trauma. We take it one step at a time, and we take those steps together.

Joseph didn't know where each step in his story would lead him - he simply had to take the journey one step at a time.

Joseph's story is a testament to the power of faith, resilience, and collaborative service. It teaches us that even when our path seems clouded there's a divine plot unfolding - one that we're co-authoring with God. Our service, then, becomes an adventure, a story of transformation and hope - not just for those we serve, but for ourselves too.

As we continue to serve our community, let's carry the spirit of Joseph with us – a spirit of resilience, collaboration, and an unwavering belief in the presence of God, even in the most unexpected of places.

### **Reflection questions:**

- How do your experiences serving the community mirror Joseph's journey?
- What have been the most impactful experiences you have had serving the community? In what ways are you presently serving?
- Can you recall moments when, despite your confusion and challenges, you later realized that you were exactly where you needed to be?
- How can our service become more of a collaborative journey, where we listen deeply and respond genuinely to the needs around us?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice service to the community?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of serving the community?



## CHAPTER 8

# SERVE: PRACTICE JUSTICE

**Rev. Jack Gregory**

**Scripture:** Micah 6:6-8

**D**uring the first half of the eighth century BCE, Israel and Judah prospered. But poor leadership, a failed rebellion, and a resurgence of Assyrian power led to the fall of Israel in 722. Judah continued to exist but lost its independence and paid tribute to Assyria. In chaotic times, it seems the powerful always find ways to protect their power and wealth. This was true for Judah, too, and the burden of Assyrian's dominion fell on the Judah's poor. Micah argued that Assyria's rule in Judah was God's punishment, and the remedy was not greater sacrifice but rather kindness, humility, and justice. (Daniel J. Simundson, "The Book of Micah," *The New Interpreters Bible*, Volume 7, © 1996 Abingdon Press, p. 534.)

Like Micah, Amos was clear that faith, regular worship, and merciful acts are no substitute for justice. Amos spoke for God: "I take no delight in your solemn assemblies... let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an overflowing steam" (Amos 5:21, 24 NRSV).

The Hebrew word translated “justice” is mishpat. Obery Hendricks writes that the underlying meaning of mishpat is egalitarian justice, a sense that everyone in society should have equal rights. “Righteousness” is a translation of tzedakah. As Amos used the word, it did not mean personal piety. Rather it meant “doing right by others.” (Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *Christians Against Christianity*, © 2021 Beacon Press, pp.38-39.) This insistence on justice put the prophets at odds with governmental and religious leaders.

The theme continues in the New Testament. Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth. He unrolled the Isaiah scroll and read:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
to bring good news to the poor.*

*(God) has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and  
recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

(Luke 4:18-19 NRSV)

When Jesus said, “today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” the people of his hometown tried to push him off a cliff. Jesus, too, experienced resistance when calling for justice for the poor and vulnerable.

The call of scripture continues today. “The United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice.” (“Social Principles,” Part V, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016, © 2016 The United Methodist Publishing House, p. 105) John and Charles Wesley stood with the poor and with vulnerable children.



They opposed slavery and cruel treatment of prisoners. The Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a Social Creed in 1908. The Evangelical United Methodist Church adopted a statement of social principles in 1946. Today “The Social Principles...are a prayerful, and thoughtful effort by the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation.”

Many of us have been taught that the church should not engage in politics. In fact there are laws, including the Johnson amendment, that prohibit churches with a nonprofit tax status from endorsing candidates. However, the Social Principles clearly state, “The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.” (“Social Principles,” Part V. The Political Community, Paragraph 164.B, p. 138.)

Practicing justice is one focus in our Discipleship Pathway. Members of our community have visited sites of racial injustice, participated in Reconciliation Services, and supported Pride events. We are a Reconciling Congregation that celebrates the worth, dignity, and gifts of all people. Faith Voices for Medicaid Expansion had its beginning at St. Paul’s. Our congregation has several Voter to Voter teams; every vote counts because every person counts. There are many ways the people of St. Paul’s practice justice.

We must be concerned with both justice and mercy. In fact, justice is rooted in God's mercy. Because God loves us unconditionally, we are called to love others without condition. So, we collect food on first Sundays, and we advocate for food benefits at the legislature.

This work happens year round, but is especially important during legislative sessions. While our legislature is meeting, there are several ways for St. Paul's to exert a strong ethical influence upon our state. Speak to a member of our Serve Team for more details!

Prayer:

O Lord, open my eyes that I may see the needs of others.  
Open my ears that I may hear their cries.  
Open my heart so that they need not be without an advocate.

Let me not be afraid to defend the weak because of the anger of the strong,  
nor afraid to defend the poor because of the anger of the rich.

Show me where love and hope and faith are needed,  
and use me to bring them to those places.

And open my eyes and my ears,  
that I may this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee.

Amen. (Alan Paton, "For Courage to Do Justice," The United Methodist Hymnal, ©1989 The United Methodist Publishing House, No. 456.)

## **Reflection questions:**

- How is justice understood by Micah, Amos, and Jesus? How do you understand justice?
- How do you distinguish justice from mercy?
- How might the scriptures speak to the current struggles of poor and vulnerable persons?
- What would a strong ethical influence upon the city, state, and nation look like for St. Paul's? ...for you?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice justice?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the ways that we practice justice?





## CHAPTER 9

# SERVE: GIVE GENEROUSLY

**Rev. Dustin Cooper**

**Scripture:** Luke 19:1-10

I grew up in a UMC with a pastor who did not shy away from talking about money. He was very clear in his preaching that tithing (giving 10%) was a church member's responsibility. His unapologetic message made an impression. When I got my first paycheck working at McDonald's, I wrote a check to the church for exactly 10% - down to the penny. I was very legalistic! That started a lifetime journey of tithing, though my motivation for giving has changed over the years: from duty to a sense of "because I was the pastor," and growing into a deep-felt sense of gratitude to the One who is the source that all that I have and whose love and grace has blessed my life.

When I started my giving journey back in the 1970's, the Church received about 75% of all charitable giving in the US. That is no longer true. Since the 1980's, when research on philanthropic giving began, gifts given to the Church have decreased every year, to the point that today only 27% of all charitable dollars are directed to the Church. There are a variety of reasons for the decline, with the primary one being the significant growth of non-profit organizations.

Many of them have full-time development directors who are asking the people sitting in our church pews to give to their mission. Additionally, pastors, most of whom were never taught about money matters in seminary, feel hesitant to preach on giving for fear of offending or angering someone who will complain that the “church only cares about my money” - and there are those in the pews who affirm that viewpoint! But perhaps the worst culprit is that the church has generally diluted the message about giving to an annual stewardship sermon focused on “raising the budget” so that the church can pay its bills. This makes giving more transactional and less missional. Together, all of this has had a negative impact on the church’s offering plates, which then impacts its ability to fulfill its mission and fund its ministries.

But this trend does not have to continue in the wrong direction! The key? Developing a new understanding that giving is a spiritual discipline, rather than a transaction or an act of duty. Just as our faith grows stronger and deeper when we pray for one another, when we gather for worship, when we serve those who are facing struggles and challenges, and when we advocate for social justice for those who are suffering or have been wronged, our faith is also impacted as we grow in generosity.

In our scripture, Zacchaeus had an unhealthy relationship with money. He saw it as a means to power and control. He also had a scarcity mindset. No matter how much he had, it was never enough. Life was spent trying to get more, even at the expense of others. Until, that is, Jesus noticed him up in that sycamore tree and invited him to come down so they

could spend some time together and get to know each other.

Meeting Jesus was a transformational event which changed Zacchaeus' life. The first expression of Zacchaeus' new-found faith is seen in his giving. Initially he repaid all those he had harmed, but then he went beyond and discovered the true joy of giving. For Zacchaeus, giving became the way he expressed his faith in Jesus and how he grew stronger and deeper in that faith relationship. That is the definition of a spiritual discipline.

In this story we learn that at the very core of giving is a spirit of gratitude. Zacchaeus did not begin giving out of a sense of duty or requirement or to help the synagogue meet a budget. It was, I believe, out of a newly discovered awareness of all the blessings God had given to him, even before he met Jesus on that road to Jericho. This attitude led to giving becoming an act of joy. Just like Zacchaeus, the more we grow in gratitude for all of God's gifts, the greater the desire we discover to give - and to do so joyfully.

Gratitude moves us to complain less and celebrate more. A thankful heart opens our eyes to see the good in all that is around us. With grateful eyes we focus less on scarcity, where we notice what we do not have, and we begin to see how much we do have, and how many blessings God has given us. When we receive those blessings with the open hand of gratitude rather than a closed fist, we begin to look for ways to give outside ourselves in order to be a blessing to others. We want our gifts to make a difference for someone else.

To be sure, growing in our giving is a journey. While the biblical standard for giving is a tithe of 10%, the journey can begin in different places. We are not called to give out of legalism, or out of shame, guilt, or pressure. Just like other disciplines, it is a journey that begins with a desire to be faithful to our call as followers of the Christ, and to grow in our own discipleship. The best place to start is to simply start somewhere.

When we begin to see generosity as a spiritual discipline, there is a clearer understanding that giving is less about the church's need to manage a budget. Instead, giving is more about our expression of our faith and our identity as a Christ follower. Our generosity then becomes the means through which all of us at St. Paul's can more effectively live into our expressed mission to Love, Seek and Serve.

### **Reflection questions:**

- Who taught you about giving?
- Reflect on some recent blessings that have impacted you. Take time to share about them with someone else.
- How has the church been a blessing to you? Your faith? Your family?
- How does a mindset of scarcity affect giving? A mindset of abundance? How is gratitude expressed in your giving?
- As you continue your discipleship journey, how will you practice giving generously?
- Going forward, how do you think the St. Paul's community could grow in the practice of giving generously?





# CLOSING

**D**iscipleship isn't a one-size-fits-all proposition. Different people will find different places of resonance and dissonance on their journey. And even for an individual – in the various stages of life – we will inevitably see that the focus of our faith shifts over time. Part of the gift of St. Paul's Discipleship Pathway is that it is wide enough and flexible enough to be a guide in any season. Another part of the gift is that we don't go at it alone. Instead, we journey together in community – not each of us in the same place, but all of us together on the same path.

We pray that the thoughts shared within these pages have been a blessing to you. Remember – these reflections are only a starting point! For each of the nine practices described, the conversations that you have had (and hopefully will continue to have), along with the experiences that you have had (and hopefully will continue to have), will provide an excellent foundation as you continue to follow Christ. Your voice and your feedback will also help St. Paul's continue growing into the church that God calls us to be.

Before you go, we would like to offer gratitude to the folks who have made this document what it is...

Without Janice Colt, you would never have been holding this book in your hands. She is our longtime Communications Director here at St. Paul's, and has designed, compiled, and edited what you have read. Thank you for your dedication to this project, Janice!



Additional thanks are due to Chandler Meierarend, who produced the accompanying video interviews. His careful eye and wealth of experience made the process as painless as possible. Thank you for your willingness to join in with St. Paul's on this project, Chandler!

Thank you to each of our contributors – to the clergy and lay leaders who offered their thoughts. Writing something down and sharing it with your community can be a nerve-wracking experience. We are grateful for your courage, wisdom, and leadership!

This project builds on a foundation forged through many years, countless volunteer hours, several strategic plans, and substantial pastoral investment. For all the staff and volunteer leaders at St. Paul's who have left their fingerprints on the Discipleship Pathway, we offer our heartfelt thanks!

We are also grateful to Pastor Kyle and Pastor Eric, who shared a dream and countless late-night messages to push this project over the finish line. Thank you for forging a vision, shaping the content, and coordinating the efforts of this team!

Finally, thank *you*. Your participation in this project will keep the Discipleship Pathway what it is at its best – a living document. And your practice of faith, lived out within St. Paul's, our city, the state, and around our world, will continue to make a difference in the lives of those you know and those you will never meet. Thank you for taking your faith seriously, for striving to follow Jesus more closely, and for being a part of this wonderful journey we share together!





## APPENDIX: 40 DAY BIBLE READING PLAN

### February 14 - March 31, 2024

Ash Wed      2/14: Psalm 51  
                  2/15: Psalm 27  
                  2/16: Psalm 130  
                  2/17: Psalm 143

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Sunday        2/18: Psalm 32  
                  2/19: Psalm 145  
                  2/20: Psalm 146  
                  2/21: Psalm 147  
                  2/22: Psalm 148  
                  2/23: Psalm 149  
                  2/24: Psalm 150

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Sunday        2/25: Psalm 95  
                  2/26: Psalm 6  
                  2/27: Psalm 25  
                  2/28: Psalm 5  
                  2/29: Psalm 102  
                  3/1: Psalm 105  
                  3/2: Psalm 31:9-16

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Sunday        3/3: Psalm 91  
                  3/4: Psalm 119:73-80  
                  3/5: Psalm 34  
                  3/6: Psalm 19  
                  3/7: Psalm 43  
                  3/8: Psalm 120; Psalm 121  
                  3/9: Psalm 122

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Sunday	3/10: Psalm 123 3/11: Psalm 124 3/12: Psalm 125 3/13: Psalm 126 3/14: Psalm 127 3/15: Psalm 128 3/16: Psalm 129
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Sunday	3/17: Psalm 130 3/18: Psalm 131 3/19: Psalm 132 3/20: Psalm 133 3/21: Psalm 134 3/22: Psalm 84 3/23: Psalm 23; Psalm 36
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Palm Sun	3/24: Psalm 118:1-4 & 19-29 3/25: Psalm 69 3/26: Psalm 71 3/27: Psalm 16; Psalm 70
Maundy Thu	3/28: Psalm 31; Psalm 46; Psalm 116
Good Fri	3/29: Psalm 22 3/30: Psalm 42; Psalm 143

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Easter	3/31: Psalm 118; Psalm 136
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**Reflection questions:**

- How do you see your own emotions and circumstances in this psalm?
- Who else might find themselves in this psalm?
- What does it sound like to hear these prayers coming from Jesus' voice?
- What does this psalm teach us about prayer?



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