



**WELLSPRING**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

# Sermon Series Devotional

4/24//2022-5/22//2022

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## Introduction

What makes for health? For a body, a sports team, a family, a company, or a church? An old book title said it best... “There’s a Lot More to Health Than Not Being Sick.” Have you ever thought about what helps us flourish? When you get past all the hype and latest fads and set aside luck, it usually comes down to the practices we put in place. “How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.”

The early church focused its attention on five practices that helped them flourish as they began their ministry together. We’re going to spend this sermon series exploring these practices that make for healthy churches and healthy Christians. Research has shown that the most vital congregations have found these 5 practices to be essential. To skimp on any of them lowers the health of the body. Each week you’ll have a chance to not only discover why our church focuses on certain things, but the ways in which you can engage and find yourself being transformed in the process. Welcome to a new life!

## Why a sermon series devotional?

A deep faith and rich discipleship is not built on an hour a week in worship. No matter how good a sermon is, there is always more to pursue. These devotionals give you the opportunity to go deeper and wider in your understanding. Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one sitting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

*“I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”*

Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*

## **Week One -Radical Hospitality**

Silos...you've heard of them. Farmers use them to store their crops after harvest. Each silo holds one crop: one for beans, one for corn. We construct silos in our personal lives all the time. We tend to gather with people who are like us, who have our same interests and values, who look like us, are in the same socio-economic status and education levels. Silos are the easiest thing to construct. And, again, the easiest thing to do is exclude people who don't fit the categories.

But hospitality is a value and practice from the early days of the Old Testament through the time of the early church that was a marker of a difference in the ways God's people were to function and behave toward others. And, believe it or not, developing a heart (and a church) of hospitality greatly enhances the health of the community. Is it difficult sometimes? Yes. Is it worth it? Yes!

### **Reflection questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?

### **Read Acts 2:42-47**

1. What part of this scripture reflects the hospitality of the early church in its practices?
2. In what ways do you believe it contributed to the quick growth of the church?
3. What do you think led these early Christians to the point of "welcoming all?"
4. How does their willingness to share also depict their welcome to others?

### **Read Romans 12:9-13**

1. What parts of this text do you struggle with the most?
2. We generally assume that our feelings must come first before we change a behavior. But science has found that often the reverse is true. What behaviors (practices) would be helpful for you to practice hospitality as this suggests?

3. We are called to embrace a number of things in this passage. What needs to be set aside for this to be possible?

### **Read Romans 15:1-7**

1. What in this scripture reflects the call to hospitality?
2. Does Paul's direction on how to treat each other in this passage come naturally to us or does it have to be practiced?
3. What are the marks of living in harmony?
4. What are the traits of God that allow us to live in harmony with one another?
5. Are there people in your life (or even in the church) with whom you have trouble living in harmony?
6. What are practices you need to put into place to grow in this regard?

### **Read Philippians 2:1-5**

1. How does this scripture lift up God's desire for the Christian community?
2. How do we encourage each other to have this "one mind" among us?
3. In a society that is increasingly interested in what is in it for ourselves, how is this scripture counter intuitive and counter cultural?

### **Reflection:**

1. What practice will I incorporate into my daily life to become more hospitable?
2. Is there something I can be doing at church to encourage hospitality?

## **Week Two -Intentional Discipleship**

Probably the best contemporary word to equate with “disciple” is “apprentice.” In many ways the role of apprentice has disappeared from our culture, but it is a good analogy. An apprentice is someone who is to learn from a master, practice the craft, and move toward mastery as well. The word “intentional” is...intentional. Building and growing into discipleship doesn’t happen by accident. To quote a pastor from years ago, “Everyone wants to be healed (saved) but no one wants to learn how to be a servant.” But this is a goal we have. Together we can do this.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. If you were going to grade yourself on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10, how would you rate yourself in discipleship?

### **Read Matthew 28:16-20**

1. Jesus uses the word “make” related to discipleship. How do you imagine you “make” a disciple?
2. In most churches, discipleship making is done by accident, hoping people will know what they need and find it within the church. In what ways do you see our church endeavoring to make disciples?
3. What experiences, environment, and teaching is needed in making disciples?
4. What does Jesus promise as we “make” disciples?

### **Read John 13:23-35**

1. What does Jesus say is at the heart of true discipleship?
2. Jesus says this at the last supper and says that the commandment is new. In what way is it new?

3. If a disciple is an apprentice, how is living out the commandment a reflection of Jesus, the master?

### **Read Luke 6:46-49**

1. Notice the difference Jesus points out between someone who hears his teaching and doesn't follow it. What is it?
2. How is developing disciples akin to building a house on a rock, instead of sand?
3. If you have a church full of people who are immature disciples, how is that akin to building on sand?
4. Compare the marks of a mature and an immature congregation. How are they different?

### **Read Matthew 16:24-26**

1. How is picking up one's cross different than just going through a difficult time?
2. How is this willingness a key mark of being a disciple?
3. What does vs.26 mean to you?
4. How are disciples being formed in Acts 2:42-47?

### **Reflection:**

1. How can I be an apprentice to Jesus? What behaviors can I incorporate in my life to develop my relationship with God?
2. Is there a group I could be a part of that would encourage my faith development?

## **Week Three - Passionate Worship**

It used to be that worship was something you did at a particular place at a designated time. If you said you were a Christian, people generally assumed you attended a church regularly for worship. But something has changed. Worship may not be something you only do at a church. Worship may not be something you go to and sit and just listen. Many people don't even think that attending a service is necessary for their faith. And what does worship mean in the time of a pandemic when a worship service can only be online? And the bigger question is...why is worship a critical aspect of our faith walk?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. How is the centrality of worship reflected in Acts 2: 42-47?

### **Read Romans 12:1-2**

1. How is worship depicted in this scripture?
2. What are the dynamics that are described?
3. How does this scripture compare with the attitude that worship is something you sit and listen to?
4. In what ways can transformation take place while worshipping?
5. When has that transformation taken place in your life?

### **Read Psalm 84**

1. In what ways is this psalm a psalm of worship?
2. What are similar aspects we find in our Sunday morning worship?
3. What aspects do you share in your private moments of worship?

**Read John 4:19-24**

1. What are the differences in attitudes about worship that are discussed in this scripture? How much of it has to do with “place” for the woman?
2. How does Jesus change the conversation about what true worship is?
3. What do you think he means?
4. When do you feel you have worshiped the most profoundly?

**Reflection:**

1. How can I incorporate worship in my daily life?
2. What place does corporate worship have in my life? How do I make it a priority?
3. How can I passionately worship?



## **Week 4- Audacious Mission and Service**

Have you ever had the experience of running into someone in a different setting and not recognizing them? Was it because of different clothing (not in a uniform, etc.) or just the different setting? Sometimes we might be expecting a previous behavior but the person has changed and we aren't aware. Perhaps they have a confidence that was lacking before, or have matured in some way. Now, what happens when we try to recognize the presence of Christ but are looking for something else? What if Jesus wants to enter our life in a way we're not prepared for?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. Have you ever been the recipient of an unselfish helping hand? What was it?
5. How are mission and service reflected in Acts 2:42-47?

### **Read Matthew 25:31-46**

1. In the scripture, the sheep and goats are separated according to what criteria?
2. What kind of actions appear to be valued by Jesus?
3. Does it strike you as odd that neither group seemed to be aware of the identification with Jesus in either offering help or refusing to?
4. What does that say about their motivations? Did either have a reward in mind in their actions?
5. Does the decision to be a servant or be engaged in mission need to be internalized or be done for ulterior motives?
6. Make a list. What are the servant activities you are engaged in? How do those activities keep you from being self-absorbed?

### **Read Acts 20:33-35**

1. What is Paul grateful for? What have they done for him?
2. Paul says he has shown them a model for what to do. What was it?
3. As Paul quotes Jesus, he says we also receive something when we engage in servanthood. What is it? The Americanized version of blessing is that we receive something. But what if the translation of the word “blessing” means “close to the heart of God?”

### **Read Matthew 9:35-39**

1. As Jesus went about, he saw the people in what condition. How is it described?
2. How does his view compare with ours? In the age of constant news coverage, how has our view of the suffering of people changed from Jesus’s time?
4. In the face of so much need how do we avoid compassion fatigue and still be a servant?

### **Read Romans 12:9-13**

1. Revisiting this scripture, how is servanthood related to the other activities?
2. How would you describe this mentality?
3. How do you practice these things for your own transformation?

### **Reflection:**

1. Where do I feel God calling me to be a servant?
2. How can I practice my faith by helping others?

## **Week 5–Extravagant Generosity**

Research has shown that for many people, when they are asked to be generous in what they offer, it is framed as, “someone is trying to take something away from me.” And yet, remembering the words of Jesus quoted by Paul, it is more blessed to give than receive. There are dynamics of generosity that often go unexplored because we want to hold on to what we have and not let go. And yet there are some counterintuitive things that happen when we decide to be generous. We have a greater sense of capacity. We experience the warmth of knowing we make a difference. It gives us a sense of our priorities. We take a stand against growing selfishness in our culture. And a generous heart opens us to receive as well. What do you want to be a part of?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. As you reflect on the message for this week, what did you hear that was new?
2. Did you feel challenged by anything you heard?
3. Were you affirmed by anything you heard?
4. How is generosity reflected in Acts 2:42-47?

### **Read Matthew 10:40-42**

1. What does scripture say about “why” a cup of cold water might be given?
2. Does this gift seem like much?
3. Do you ever struggle with feeling like what you have to offer doesn’t amount to much?
4. How does this compare with Luke 21:1-4?
5. What did their responses reveal about how they felt about Jesus waiting to come?

### **Read II Corinthians 9:6-15**

1. How are sowing and reaping related?
2. What does it mean that God provides blessings in abundance that might have enough? Does that sound contradictory?

3. This scripture says that there is an extra benefit that goes beyond just the help that is offered. What else is produced?
4. How is generosity an act of obedience?
5. In what ways is a person's generosity multiplied by God?

**Read Matthew 28:16-20**

1. What does this passage have to do with generosity?
2. The literal translation of verse 19 is "as you go about, make disciples..." What does this mean to you?

**Reflection:**

1. How can I express generosity in my life?
2. What are some specific ways I can be generous in sharing my faith?