

You Matter!

You Matter to God: Faith Study for Faith Formation & Small Groups

Session 3 - Your Life Matters: Tending the Soul & Living an Integrated Life

Opening Questions

- What is something you do every day or almost every day?
- When you're down or in a difficult time, what renews you or helps you to feel better?

Opening Prayer Practice

God, we come together today to be with you and with one another. In the silence, we give you all the things that filled our day, all the distractions that fill our minds, and all that is on our hearts – so that we might be present to listen to one another and to listen for you.

(2-3 minutes of silence)

Open our hearts, God to be filled with your love. Open our hearts with wonder, to see one another as your beloved creation. Open our hearts with love, to listen deeply. Open our hearts with imagination, to see your hopes and dreams for the world. Open our hearts, God, to be your love for the world. Amen.

What Does the Bible Say?

Exodus 3:1-5 (NRSV)

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

John 15:5 & 9 (NRSV)

[Jesus said,] "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing...As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love."

Think About...

- What words or phrases stand out to you, as you read these Scripture texts today?
- How do these texts speak to the themes *You Matter to God* and *You Matter to Your Neighbor*?
- How would you respond if you were told “the place on which you are standing is holy ground”?

What Do Others Say?

As we look at the landscape of our lives, we all have parts that are meaning making and parts that feel more like duty or obligation, We have parts that are energizing and life giving and parts that drain our energy. We have parts that feel mundane and parts that spark our sense of joy and imagination. There are parts we say “Yes!” to with our whole hearts; and parts that we say no to, or wish we’d said no to. The process of choosing how we invest our time and energy is a dynamic dance that moves us back and forth across the spectrum from exhausted to exhilarated, from discombobulated to centered.

After Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, I watched the documentary *RBG*. Beyond her extraordinary dedication to justice and her all-consuming work ethic, one of the details that stood out to me was how much Ruth Bader Ginsburg loved the opera. In the documentary, Ginsburg’s granddaughter described it this way: “She saw [opera] as a place of tranquility that was outside of her job.” It fed her soul. It was a source of delight and joy that was renewing.

It is so easy, for so many reasons, to lose sight of what feeds our soul. It is so tempting to let the demands of life push aside what is our source of delight and renewing joy. But for us to live into our various callings and important relationships, and discern wisely between our yeses and noes, it is essential that we tend to our own souls and carve out space for that which is renewing. One of the ways we do this is by connecting with the generative power of the Divine.

In John 15:5, Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” When I was in seminary, I did group spiritual direction with retired professor, Bill Smith. As he guided us through this passage, he shared that an alternative translation for the Greek word for “abide” is “make your home.” So, in verse five, “abide in me” becomes “make your home in me.” Later in verse nine, “abide in my love” becomes “make your home in my love.” For me, that sparks my imagination for how all parts of life are spiritual and the spiritual life encompasses all of life.

That, too, is easy to lose sight of in the busyness of life or amidst the worries or burdens of the day. Yet a few intentional practices that can help us live awake and attentive to God’s presence and activity all around us. One of those practices is the simple act of noticing. When reading the opening verses of Exodus chapter three, I’ve often thought that the most extraordinary thing is

not that there was a bush that appeared to be on fire but was not consumed. The most extraordinary thing may be that Moses noticed and went to investigate. As Moses approached the burning bush with curiosity, the LORD said to him "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Moses was in the midst of ordinary life, doing his day job, when he noticed and let God show him the holy ground that was right before him.

Over the centuries, people seeking to live attentive to God's presence and activity all around them have embraced a spiritual practice called "Rule of Life." While the name may sound a bit overwhelming, really it is about developing a rhythm or framework of core faith practices that remind you that you are a loved child of God and that you matter to God. By following a set of faith practices that you do every day or every week, on the good days and the bad days and the ordinary days, *all* of your days become infused with a sense of God's love and presence. And with that perspective comes eyes to see and notice how God is active in the world around you. In other words, to wake up and see the burning bush.

What does this look like? You may already have a practice of worship each week or perhaps you spend time in prayer in each day. These are both faith practices and as you do them consistently, they become a part of your "Rule of Life." These practices are steady and dependable and stay with you in good times and rough times to remind you that you are loved, God is present with you and God wants you to feed your soul with what brings you joy and delight. Yes, tending our soul with joy is something God wants for us and a core part of our renewal. It gives us the grounding we need to reach out and matter to others.

Each person's "Rule of Life" is unique to them. There is no "perfect" rule for everyone. Think about: "What faith practices remind me that I'm loved by God and bring me God's renewal?". This season is a great time to try new practices and see how they fit for you. Here are some ideas and your group can add others:

- Start each day by giving yourself or someone you love a blessing: "You are a beloved child of God, created by the Creator of the universe."
- Write a few things you're grateful for each day to give you eyes to see the goodness in your life and how God is present.
- Make a commitment to spend a day or part of a day as a Sabbath, simply resting or doing whatever you find renewing.
- Spend time each day reading a Psalm or a book of the Bible or read something written by others from a faith perspective.
- Whether you're an artist or not, read a text from the Bible and spend some time doodling or using colored pencils or crayons, reflecting on what you hear. What do you discover as you step back and view your work?

- Find something you see in daily life that reminds you of God (an evergreen tree, a picture of a loved one, water). Each time you see that item, lift a prayer of thanks.

Abiding in God's love can take many different shapes and can easily fit into the rhythm of daily life. This renewing rhythm is part of a larger cycle. During the 2020 Evolving Faith Conference, Rev. Rhina Ramos observed, "God is not interested in us putting God in a box. He's only interested in our eyes being open. That are hearts are open. At the end of the day, it's only love that is going to save us. Because it is for freedom that we are born. Amen."

-Pastor Jeanne Hartfield and Denise Floe

A Moment for Individual Reflection

Spend 1-3 minutes in silent reflection on the writing or these questions:

In this season, what helps me to be attentive to God and live in a rhythm that is renewing?
What is holy about where we are? What is renewing about where we are?

Think About...

- What are the things that are life-giving, joyful or renewing for you? What is it about that activity that draws you in? How often are you able to take part? Does it change you in any way?
- What faith practices have been sustaining for you? What is it about those practices that you find valuable? How have your faith practices changed over time? If you were to bring in another faith practice, what would you look for? What are you longing for in your life?
- Has there been a time when you were surprised to discover a sense of God's presence with you or a time when you saw something that brought you a sense of wonder or awe about God? Did the experience change you in any way?
- There are days that are about obligations and duties and days that are meaning making. What gives life meaning for you? What does a meaning making day look like?
- Using your imagination, what would a renewing Sabbath day look like for you? What would it take for you to be able to take a Sabbath day (or half day) once a week? What would you need to do to make that possible?
- How has the pandemic impacted how you care for your soul or the rhythm of your faith practices? How has this changed across the course of the pandemic?
- What role do other people play in tending to our soul? How do we tend to the soul of others in our life?
- What is a spiritual practice or a life practice that you'd like to try? What would you need to do to make that possible? Is there something you do in daily life that could be transformed into a faith practice?

Connecting Faith with Daily Life

- Try a new faith practice this week. What was restorative about the practice? What was challenging about it? Share with the group the next time you gather.
- Do an act of service for another person and reflect on how serving others is a faith practice.
- What is something from your everyday life that could become a faith practice, simply by using it to remind you of God or as a prompt for a moment of prayer.
- Set aside a few hours or a day as a Sabbath. What is something you'd include that brings you joy and renewal? What is something you'd include that connects you with God?

Closing Prayer

Begin the closing prayer with a few moments of a breath prayer:

Breath of God (*breathe in*)

Fill us with your Love (*breathe out, pause for a moment of silence*)

Breath of God (*breathe in*)

Fill us with your Love (*breathe out, pause for a moment of silence*)

Breath of God (*breathe in*)

Fill us with your Love (*breathe out, pause for a moment of silence*)

God of love, this time together has been holy. We thank you for each person gathered here. We give you all that is on our hearts, knowing that your love and care extends beyond what we can even imagine and that your presence never leaves us. Lead us to times of rest and joy in your presence, so that we are renewed. Fill us with your love, O God. Move us to be people who love. Amen.