

“The Walk: Worship and Prayer”

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Sermon by Brad Hilleary

The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life series

OPENING PRAYER

God may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight as you are our strength and redeemer. Amen

Happy Epiphany Sunday!

Happy Communion Sunday!

Happy to the beginning to a new sermon series!

And HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

I pray your holidays went well and your bellies are happy. Now it is time for treadmills, diets and New Year’s Resolutions. So, with the New Year are we starting new or does the journey simply continue? Maybe a little of both.

As I said we are beginning a new sermon series based on the Adam Hamilton book, “The Walk: The Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life.” They are:

1. Worship & Prayer
2. Study
3. Serve
4. Give
5. Share

Over the next four weeks myself and three other lay speakers will talk about the first four of these with Pastor Mary batting cleanup with sharing.

Today I will be sharing about worship and prayer which is chapter one. Actually, the entire chapter is on worship just two kinds of worship. Worship in community, like this, and individual worship which is prayer.

Ok, now I need you to be brave for me, are you ready? By a show of hands, who can name something you do in community worship. Great, now I need you to be even braver, shout out loud what some of those might be? (Write them on an easel up front)

That is great. Thank you for being brave and participating. In his book, Adam Hamilton shares the seven elements of the early and mostly today Sunday morning community worship:

1. Pray with each other, for each other, giving thanks to God.
2. Singing songs together. Praising God.
3. Breaking bread together - sharing the Lord’s supper as a way of communion with Christ and one another.

4. Confess our sins to God, (oh my), and to one another, (oh boy).
5. Reflect together on the scriptures and the stories of Jesus that we might be more faithful followers of Jesus.
6. Encourage one another to live a life of love and good deeds.
7. Collect an offering seeking to help others.

Adam goes on to challenge us in a different way when it comes to worshipping. He says don't attend worship. Well, we are here right now that is attending. We take attendance each week. He said don't attend, instead, "ENGAGE!" You attend a movie, or a dance recital. Attend would mean you go listen and leave. I'll admit, I have attended far too many worship services myself. When I have engaged in worship though everything changes and the worship experience becomes alive, powerful, moving, meaningful and passionate. I would like to share a story with you when I engaged, maybe for the first time in worship.

Around 25 years ago I was invited to go to a Christian conference by a co-worker. Now I was a Methodist back then as well and he was a Baptist. The conference sounded a little to Baptist to me so I passed. Well as God so often works a couple of the guys at church started to talk about this conference and we decided to go. I said, I know a guy. So, my guy really hooked us up, bus ride there and back hotel rooms, meals and tickets. He was the easy button.

This event was at the Silver Dome where the Lions used to play and it was packed. The seats held 80,000+ and the entire floor where the field was was filled with chairs.

The first thing I noticed was this was not your typical Methodist worship service. Men of all ages and looks were praising Jesus in a big way. I will always remember this huge guy, shaved head, huge earring with his arms in the air, eyes closed singing with tears coming down his face. I was really taking it all in, I was attending a very cool event. There were great speakers and a super band and choir, attending this event was quite nice.

Then came a song. A song I have sung over 100 times, a song I almost knew by heart. I cannot put into words what 80,000+ men singing, "How Great Thou Art," was like. As the song went on, I stopped attending, I began to engage! My hands went up over my head - never done that before. And then, my emotions completely took over and I began to tear up. I tried to stop it but nope, no way the water works had begun.

When the song ended, I was exhausted any energized at the same time. I then felt ashamed. Why was I crying, I'm not a baby? That is when I looked to my right and left and all the men from Lake Harbor were crying as well. One of them saying out loud

if your eyes aren't wet, you missed it. I truly ENGAGED in worship that day and I will never forget it.

Did you know that the word Worship comes from an early English word Worth-Ship, which suggests someone who is recognized as worthy? Worship is how we respond to a worthy God our creator as we acknowledge his:

Glory
Majesty
Greatness
Power and
Goodness.

I think these five words are great, however I suggest if we start worship with five different words we will be on the right track:

Thank you, God.
I love you God!

The second part of the chapter talks about individual worship or prayer. In our prayers we:

Praise
Confess
Ask God for help
GIVE THANKS!!!

Giving thanks is important not only as an appropriate response to God but also for our own emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. A Benedictine monk put it this way: It is not happiness that makes us grateful, but gratefulness that makes us happy.

In a recent study less than half of all adults in America pray even once a week

I can relate to the study sharing so few people pray on a regular basis. Here is my story. I have been in the Methodist church my entire 52 years on this earth. I have heard pastors pray, teachers pray, worship leaders pray, youth group leaders pray, my parents pray. But in each of those occasions, I was an attendee to the prayer. I listened, but I did not engage in the prayer. Sure, I was taught the Lord's Prayer from an early age but that simply became repetition.

It wasn't until I came here almost 30 years ago that I truly learned to pray. There was an adult Sunday School class that I attended and the teacher who was a good friend challenged each of us to pray during the week, even if it was just once a day. I raised my hand, a little embarrassed and said, I don't know how. Bless her heart, Pat Bethke took me aside after the class and asked what I meant, and then she taught me to pray, hands on. We started with God thank you for this breath, God thank you for this day. She said

it does not have to be fancy just from the heart. To this day I start almost every prayer with thanks, and usually, **Thank you God for my life and my wife!**

So, if you are like me, and praying by yourself is a little scary or you just don't where to begin, ask someone to help. Ask me, Pastor Mary, Pastor John who is sharing the Lord's Supper today, please ask. Because having individual worship with God, is an amazing thing for you and also for all those you pray for.

The book challenges us with a prayer exercise. So as part of you New Year's resolutions, go add this to the schedule: Pray 5 times a day!

It can be really simple, five times look up and say, "thank you, God," or "I love you, God." Or maybe when you get up, when you go to bed, and then eat your three meals.

This was a great first chapter to begin this series on and the New Year on. Get more engaged in your worship, both in community and through prayer. When we do, we will be a LIVING HALLELUJAH!!

Let's pray:

Thank you, God. I love you God. Walk with us as we engage more in worshipping you. You are truly worthy of all our praise. We pray today for our Pastor and Shepherd Mary in her time of Sabbath and rest. We pray for our community and world, Lord that we all strive for peace and unity by sharing and showing your love. We pray for all effected by Covid and other sickness that you surround them with angels of mercy. We thank you for your Word and how it teaches us something new every time we read or hear it, God. Continue to hold our hand and guide our steps by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.