

## SIMPLE 7: simple, sacred ways to grow in faith and love

Most of us know what it takes to be physically healthy: eat a nutritious diet, drink plenty of water, exercise, get enough sleep, visit your doctor, reduce stress, laugh often. We might not do all of those every day, but we at least know how live a healthy life.

What about our spiritual lives? What promotes spiritual health and vitality? Are we as clear about that as we are about our physical lives?

I'm not. I tend to be much more aware of and responsive to my physical needs than my spiritual ones, perhaps because they are more obvious: I get tired, I go to sleep; I'm hungry, I eat; I'm thirsty, I get a drink; my wife reminds me, and I go to the doctor.

Our spiritual needs are just as important – maybe even more so. After all, our bodies are temporary; the soul is eternal. From the very beginning, Christians have turned to seven basic practices to nurture the soul and deepen our eternal journey with God.

Those practices are:

**Sunday Worship**

**Scripture Reading**

**Seeking God in Prayer**

**Service**

**Stewardship**

**Spiritual Friendship**

**Sabbath**

In all likelihood you are practicing some or most of these already. This guide offers simple ways to deepen your practice or to get started. Go easy on yourself. Don't try to do them all at once. Instead, try adding them gradually into your life. And you won't be "going it alone" as we will be practicing them together as a church family. Just as food provides energy and sustenance to your body, these practices will nourish your spirit.

Above all, please remember this: the Simple 7 are not a spiritual scorecard or a way to become a "super Christian," whatever that is. The Simple 7 are simply ways to help us grow in faith and love as disciples of Jesus. They are food and exercise for the soul.

With you on the journey,  
Matt

### **GETTING STARTED**

*Throughout the booklet you will find hints, tips and resources to help you in your practice of the Simple 7.*

*Please see the back page for more information on opportunities to engage the Simple 7 on your Lenten journey.*



## SUNDAY WORSHIP

What could be more fundamental to the Christian life than gathering with others to worship God for who God is and be encouraged in our faith? Worship is central to everything we do as Christians. Worship tells us who we are and whose we are. Of the Simple 7, being present for Sunday worship may require the least amount of adjustment to your life.

However, a commitment to worship *weekly* might be a new practice. I encourage you to give it a try and see the effect it has on our spiritual life and relationship with God. If your travels take you out of town, why not find a place to worship there as well? When your schedule requires you to work on Sunday, or support your children in a sporting event, find an alternate time and place of worship. Many churches offer services on other days of the week, and this is a wonderful opportunity to experience worship in a different tradition or style.

One important thing to remember is that worship does not only mean attending a church, but worship occurs wherever and whenever you encounter the presence of God.

***Worship, verb***  
the act of showing respect and love for a deity, especially by praying with other people who share similar beliefs and practices: the act of worshipping God.

- Merriam Webster

## SEEKING GOD IN PRAYER

Prayer itself is not difficult. If you can communicate, you can pray. If you can sit quietly, you can pray. And yet prayer takes practice. Overtime, the act daily prayer builds an ongoing conversation and relationship with God that is as natural and easy as with a close friend. However, since people are visible and God is not, many find it important to inject prayer into several points of the day that are almost guaranteed to happen every day: when waking up, before meals and before going to bed.

### Morning Prayer

You may already have a book of devotions or prayers that are meaningful to you. If so, keep it by your bedside and read one before your feet touch the floor. Many people open up their email every morning to find a devotion (including a scripture reading, reflections and short prayer) prepared by the UCC Still Speaking Writer's Group.

You might choose to keep a Bible near your bed and read a psalm each morning. Psalm 23; Psalm 63: 1-7 and Psalm 139: 1-12 are great places to start. Just doing that much will help you turn your day over to God.

### Before Meals

Mealtimes offer an opportunity to stop, close our eyes, breath, smell, and be grateful for the gift of life-sustaining food before us. Mealtime prayers need not be fancy, formal or long. If you eat with others you might ask them to join you. One family I know has a simple prayer they recite together before dinner: "Thank you God for this good food. Amen." There are many table prayers available online or from you own family tradition.

### Before Going to Bed

At the end of the day, just before you go to bed each night, recite Psalm 62:5 "For God alone my soul waits in silence" sit in silence for a few minutes and give God THANKS for the blessings you received during the day, seek FORGIVENESS for your mistakes and HELP for the day ahead. Once you have unloaded everything on your mind in this way, sit and breathe in silence and stillness for a few minutes and know that you are held in the love of God. Additional perk: you'll sleep easier.

### And finally

As you begin to anchor your day in these intentional practices of prayer, you may find yourself praying spontaneously at other points in the day. Remember, prayer is not all about words. While words can help orient the mind and heart toward God, silence and stillness is the most direct route. For some, prayer might look more active, like taking a walk, dancing or baking. Find what works and do it every day with the intention to seek and be found by the lover of your soul.

### *Three short prayers for any occasion*

*Lord, grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I can not change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

*Lord, help me to remember that  
nothing will happen to me today that  
you and I can't handle together.*

*Into your hands, Lord God, I commit  
my spirit.*

## SCRIPTURE READING

The Barna Research group reports that 91% of all households in the U.S. own at least one Bible. However, fewer than 40% of adults read their Bible during the week. That means the “good book” gathers more dust than readers. The good news is if you do not naturally gravitate toward the Bible throughout the week, you’re not alone.

Here’s a simple way to dive in. Start with the gospel of Matthew. If you read five chapters (they are short) of the gospel of Matthew every week, you will finish the entire thing in 6 weeks. If you want to do more, add a chapter a day of Proverbs. On average, this will require 15 minutes a day, and I recommend reading at the same time every day in order to make it a habit.

Before you open your Bible, offer this simple prayer: “Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me. Open my eyes illumine me, spirit divine!”

There are many reasons why people do not spend time with the Bible, but mostly it’s because we have not developed the habit of seeking God in scripture. Although some parts of the Bible are mystifying, even for very educated readers, there is simply no better resource for discovering who God is and who we are called to be.

If you are in need of a Bible upgrade, feel free to pick up a copy of the Common English Bible, a new, fresh, easy-to-read translation, available at the church for a small donation.

### *Where to turn in the Bible when you need:*

***Comfort*** in times of ***trouble***:

Psalm 23:1-6 | Isaiah 41:10 | Hebrews 13:5-6  
Romans 8:26-28 | Corinthians 1:3-5

***Courage*** when ***fearful***:

Hebrews 13:5-6  
Ephesians 6:10-18

***Guidance*** when making ***decisions***:

James 1:5, 6 | Proverbs 3:5-6

***Peace*** in times of ***turmoil***:

Isaiah 26:3-4  
Philippians 4:6-7

***Relief*** when you are ***suffering***:

2 Corinthians 12:8-1 | Hebrews 12:3-13

***Rest*** when you are ***weary***:

Matthew 11:28-29 | Psalm 23:1-6

***Gratitude*** for life’s  ***blessings***

Psalm 100:1-5 | Colossians 3:15

***Joy*** in times of ***Celebration***

Psalm 118:24 | Luke 1:46-50

## SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Friendship: it's one of life's greatest gems. Yet true friendship takes work. It requires a commitment to be present and walk with each other through the joys and sorrows of life. And it is so worth it.

What we call "Spiritual friendship" is different from other forms of friendship because the relationship is based on a shared spiritual journey and a mutual desire to grow as disciples. A spiritual friend is someone you are comfortable praying with and sharing your life of faith.

Ours is a large church and making friends, to say nothing of building meaningful spiritual friendships, can be a daunting prospect. Thankfully, there are a few tried and true ways to jump-start the process: Christian Sharing Groups (which typically meet once a month for spiritual conversation and prayer), mission work (down the street or across the world), joining with others in a fellowship group such as the Hill Quilters or Step Up Step Out.

One way to connect with other church members may be to find someone engaging with the Simple 7 and reflect on the following questions together:

What am I discovering through the practice of the Simple 7?  
What has been challenging for me?  
What has brought me the most joy and strength?  
Where am I encountering God?



## STEWARDSHIP

The gospel of John states,  
“For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son ...”

Giving and sacrifice are central to the character of God and to the Christian life, but for us, cultivating a generous heart and a habit of giving can be difficult. That is, they’re simple, but not easy. Becoming a more generous person is a journey from fear to faith. For me, the main reason I do not give more than I already do, is not because I don’t have more to give, but because I fear I won’t have enough left over. When I surrender to that fear, I severely limit the ability for God’s grace to work in and through me.

As you engage with this practice, I encourage you to find a way to give more to an organization near and dear to you. Find a way to be more generous with the level of attention you give to your family and loved ones. Find a way to surprise someone with an unexpected act of generosity and kindness.

For your sake, don’t ignore this one! Stewardship is one of the most joyful and immediately gratifying practices of the Simple 7.



## SERVICE

Contributing our financial resources is important, but it is only one form of giving and sacrifice.



Practicing the Simple 7 means we find other opportunities to serve God. The important thing to remember is that whatever you do to serve in the name of Christ is Christian service. If your friend or neighbor is struggling with a crisis, providing a meal, helping run errands or cutting their grass are all ways to honor God through service.



Along with Stewardship, serving others is one of the most rewarding habits we can cultivate as Christians.



### *A few ways to put your faith in action through service:*

serving at church as an usher, greeter, or lay reader;

teaching Sunday School, serving on a committee;

tutoring a child, volunteering time to help build a home;

helping to prepare or serve a meal at Loaves and Fishes Ministries or Peter's Retreat;

donating non-perishable food items for our "Table to table" ministry on Communion Sundays

## SABBATH

*God blessed the seventh day, because on that day, God rested from work,  
all the creating God had done.* - Genesis 2:2

In our work-crazy, on-the-go, device-dependent, highly-distracted lives, we have lost the important balance of work and rest. In a world where the universal mantra is, "I'm so busy," sabbath is downright counter-cultural!

Even though we are routinely exhausted, we carry our busyness like a trophy. The busier we are the more important we must be. The commandment to "Remember the Sabbath" is not only a command to "stop and smell the roses," but also to consider our gratuitousness. We are not as important or as necessary as we might think. The world does not depend on us. No one is more important than God – and even God took a day off.

Practicing sabbath means we deliberately set aside time to unplug, relax, reflect on our blessings and do as little as possible so God can do as much as possible with us.

For some people, sabbath-keeping will mean taking several hours, or up to a full day off doing as little work (including housework) as possible. For others, it will mean injecting 5 – 10 minutes of silence and stillness (refer back to the practices of Seeking God in Prayer) into every day. Start small and build up each week. God is waiting to take a breather with you!

### *Seven Simple ways to "keep the sabbath"*

1. Check email only at set times during your day and live free of it the rest of the day.
2. Learn to say "no" to things that fill your schedule and leave little time for rest and renewal.
3. Always eat lunch and always eat dinner, sitting down, perhaps with a tablecloth or cloth napkin you keep in your desk drawer.
4. Make a list of things you would do "If only I had the time!" Do one a week.
5. Write a letter to an old friend, clean a corner of your home or take time to prepare a special meal with friends or family.
6. Look at an old photo album. Turn the pages slowly. Linger over each picture.
7. Whenever the phone rings, or the clock dings, take two slow breaths.