



An Order of Worship for the Home

January 31, 2021

This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

Reader 1: We gather to worship. We gather to pray.

Reader 2: We gather to our God and to his word.

Reader 1: We gather in the name of our God who is...

Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

Together: Amen.

Psalm 95

¹ Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the Lord is a great God,

and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

⁷ For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

Today, if you hear his voice,

⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

⁹ when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,
and they have not known my ways."

¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath,
"They shall not enter my rest."

Confession & Absolution

*Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith.
Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.*

Christian Confessing: Jesus, you alone are my guide. Yet, I have often followed the guidance of this world or presumed to guide myself. You alone are the goal of my life. Here too, I have made substitutions, and I've allowed lesser goals to capture my heart. Forgive me and change me. Discipline my heart to love you, my will to follow you, and my hands to serve you. Grant this, Lord, by your grace.

Christian Responding: Your Lord always hears your confession, and he faithfully answers with grace, mercy, and pardon. When his children

ask, he forgives. This promise is for you, and his forgiveness yours! Further, in Baptism he's given you his Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will guide your heart, your will, and your hands in every calling he's placed on your life.

Together: Amen.

John 20:19-23

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

1 Corinthians 3:10-17

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest,

for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Message

Corporate Disciplines: Grace Seeks Unity

I used to do a lot of rock climbing. Rock climbers use a safety system where the climber wears a rope connecting them to a friend who is ready to catch their fall, should they need it. That second person is called a belayer. If you're the belayer, your brake hand never leaves the rope. Never! When learning to belay, you practice letting rope out and taking it in while *always* keeping your brake hand in place. The motions are not natural. They have to be learned at first, but with enough practice they become automatic.

This is the goal of the spiritual disciplines. They are unnatural at first. They have to be learned, but with enough practice they become automatic – at least in part. We're not going to discipline ourselves into holiness, but we can form some habits which regularly direct our attention back to Jesus. That's why we've been spending time learning about the spiritual disciplines and trying some practices which may help us.

I wanted to use that rock climbing analogy today because it's a great example of a practice which benefits others; it's a practice which actually *requires* others. Today, we'll spend time looking at the corporate spiritual disciplines. These are actions which we put into practice with other people. Some corporate disciplines work best with other people, and other disciplines actually require connection with brothers and sisters in faith.

Right from the start, I want you to hear this: **Sin separates and isolates, but grace seeks unity.**

We'll come back to that phrase throughout this message, because it stands at the heart of the corporate disciplines. These practices direct us back to unity with God's people again and again, as they also direct us back to Jesus as guide and goal of our faith. The four corporate disciplines we want to talk about today include confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. As we've done the last two weeks, we'll take these one at a time in order to better understand them. Then, as in past weeks, I'll share an activity which you can put into practice over the coming week.

Speaking of that, last week I asked you to practice confession with a brother or sister in the faith. What was that like? I remember the first time I sought that out. It was difficult. I knew I had some heavy stuff to unload, and it was hard to bring it out in front of another person – even in front of someone I trusted. In the end, however, it was a great healing experience for me.

Confession is still hard for me, because it forces me to admit my weakness. I don't like that. I don't think any of us do. If you were a gifted painter and you were invited to share your gift with an audience from another culture whose language you don't speak, you wouldn't give a lecture on painting. You would show your paintings. Confession is kind of like trying to give the lecture. Confession is where we bring out all the things we're worst at. We usually share our successes with others, not our failures. That's why we don't like confession.

Yet, confession is good for us. It's good because in confession we move from pretending to honesty. We're uncovering what's already there. Nobody else may know it's there, but we do. We know, and we instinctively try to hide it from others. That instinct separates us from God's family, and it drives us from God as well.

Sin separates and isolates.

When we have sin in our lives, there's only one solution. As often as we try to hide our sin, or ignore our guilt, the only solution is to bring it to Jesus. His grace is sufficient.

Jesus can remove your guilt. Jesus can remove the walls which stand between you and your brothers and sisters. Jesus can bridge the barrier which separates you from your heavenly Father. Jesus restores your relationship with God, and with his people. That's his grace at work.

Grace seeks unity.

Confession is a practice we share *with* one another, because it's God's desire to bind us *to* one another. Too often we assume we can have an intimate relationship with Christ while remaining at arm's length from his people. This is not our Savior's plan. We are one body, joined to one another under one head who is Christ. Confession brings us back to that reality, and back into that unity.

The second corporate discipline we want to look at today is worship. We read Psalm 95 earlier, which gives great insights into worship as a corporate discipline. The psalm's call to worship is a call to community. Listen to the repeated use of "us" as the psalm opens.

*¹ Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
(Psalm 95:1-2)*

After the call to community worship, the second half of the psalm gives a warning.

*Today, if you hear his voice,
⁸ do not harden your hearts... (Psalm 95:7b-8a)*

This is a call to worship in unity *under God's direction*. Like Israel, we gather to worship our God. Like Israel, we also hear God's voice regularly. We hear him speak in his Word. We recognize his presence among us as a gathered people. If there is no unity in our worship, is there any unity at all?

The psalm directs our attention to a low point in Israel's community life. They were in the wilderness without water, and they started complaining against God. Sin was trying to separate them from God. Sin was beginning to isolate people from the One who had rescued them from Egypt. They were asking, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

The psalm is a warning against this type of division. The psalm reminds us that our unity as a people comes from hearing God's voice and living as he instructs. Worship unity is an expression of the unity we're given every day. Unity in our day-to-day lives is an expression of the unity God provides in worship. God calls us back to unity under his direction.

Sin separates and isolates, but grace seeks unity.

We've talked about confession and worship. Guidance is the third practice in this group of corporate spiritual disciplines. Guidance is not about guiding one another. Instead, guidance is provided by God. The spiritual discipline of guidance is the practice of receiving direction from the Holy Spirit and following that direction. This is about God guiding us. Guidance is not always considered a corporate activity, but I think it's healthy to emphasize the place of Christian community with this discipline.

When we consider spiritual guidance, we must remember that not all spiritual voices desire good for us. There are spiritual voices which are not good. We have examples of this in Scripture as a reminder of the very real presence of evil in our world. For this reason, we are called to be discerning.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God... (1 John 4:1)

It's this "testing" which requires discipline and community. Whether we perceive God's direction from reading his Word, through circumstances in life, or from a "still, small voice," the discipline of guidance brings us to the Christian community for confirmation. We help one another better discern the voice of God.

This can be hard, especially if the “calling” we hear from God excites us. When this is the case, we remind ourselves that our heavenly Father is a God of unity. **Sin desires to separate and isolate, but grace seeks unity.** Sometimes I have to slow down and trust that God will guide us, not just me, into his plans.

In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul repeatedly directs an early Christian congregation back to the unity they have in Christ. Sin had separated people, and it had begun to isolate groups from one another. This made a mess of their worship life, and the supposed guidance some individuals were following was only increasing this isolation.

In the verses we read earlier, Paul warns against pitting teachers in the church against one another. He calls the church back to unity, and then he makes this amazing claim:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

It's a beautiful statement made all the more amazing because the word “you” is plural. God has given his Holy Spirit to the group of brothers and sisters I am joined to as church. If God's guidance is going to be confirmed in any place in my life, it will happen where God is present. He is present in the community of the local church. That's not my opinion. That's what God's Word tells me.

Sometimes, we have to be ready to hear difficult words from God's people. I know a couple who asked for help discerning God's calling for their family. They had an opportunity to help with infertility through surrogacy. They were excited about this, but wanted to hear from their church. The surrogacy process would mean new life would begin in a laboratory and then be introduced into the surrogate mother's womb. In case implantation didn't work the first time, multiple lives would begin, but only one would be implanted. The others would be used if needed, or frozen indefinitely. For privacy, the couple's request for guidance wasn't brought to the entire church, but to a small number. In the end, they were cautioned against surrogacy. It was difficult for them to hear this.

At other times the practice of discerning guidance as a community can be exciting and joyful. In our Lutheran church body, I couldn't simply get a seminary education and declare myself a pastor. Before I even went to seminary, my local congregation, among others, had to affirm God's calling in my life. The voice of God speaking in my life was confirmed as we practiced this discipline of guidance together. I thought God was calling me, and the church confirmed that call. That was a joyful outcome.

In my experience we practice guidance in limited ways, but we could do so much better.

- First, we don't need to reserve this type of discernment for big, once-in-a-lifetime decisions, although the bigger the decision, the more attention we should give to it.
- Second, I wonder if we too often pray for friends, but leave them on their own to hear God's answers? (Keep in mind, it's sin that separates and isolates; grace seeks unity.) Maybe, as we walk with friends in faith, small groups could come alongside individuals in prayer and share in listening to God. That would create space for God to reveal his will through the community of other brothers and sisters.
- Finally, the practice of guidance cannot be separated from the other disciplines. As we grow in our comfort with other practices of faith, we will undoubtedly grow in our ability to help one another in guidance. This truth should remind us of a precious gift we acknowledge when we ask others to hear God with us. Guidance desires that brothers and sisters with greater maturity in faith would help us "test the spirits." This reliance on others is a reliance on God's grace.

Sin separates and isolates, but grace seeks unity.

The final outward discipline we want to look at is celebration. Celebration truly comes as the culmination of all these other disciplines. It finds a home among the corporate disciplines because, let's face it, parties are better with friends! There is no true and healthy form of celebration which keeps others away. Celebration always invites!

I actually want to save a longer discussion of celebration for next week, when we'll review all the disciplines we've discussed. For now, let me share a story which helps place celebration in context with today's message. It connects well with the refrain to which we keep returning:

Sin separates and isolates, but grace seeks unity.

Jesus told a story about a shepherd who had 100 sheep. At the end of the day, he counted only 99 present with him. One was missing. In some ways, that's like 99% unity. Most people would think that's really good. Any organization would love to have 99% of their people on the same page.

Everyone thinks 99% unity is pretty great... except for those in the 1%. They're the one separated. They're the one isolated.

The shepherd knows this, and he's not satisfied with 99% unity. He leaves the 99 to seek out the one who is alone. He finds the one sheep separated from the others; isolated in the wilderness. The shepherd brings his sheep back.

That story is a picture of Jesus. He didn't go to the cross to provide 99% forgiveness. He didn't die to protect 99% of his people from death. He didn't rise to give 99% new life. Jesus died and rose so you, and me, and every person who calls on his name would be saved. He wants 100% together, under his care. That's his grace. When you're the 1% he seeks you out.

Grace seeks unity.

All these spiritual disciplines point us back to Jesus as guide and goal of our faith, because it's in him that we receive this grace and unity. When he restores us to himself and connects us to one another, the celebration begins. That story about the shepherd ends like this:

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' (Luke 15:6)

As you allow Jesus to bring you into the unity he provides, he throws a party. If you're separated, grace is seeking you. If you're isolated, grace is searching for you.

If you're among the 99, rejoice with your shepherd. Celebrate with Jesus! Allow his joy to encourage your practice of confession, worship, and guidance. Let these constantly bring you back to Jesus; back to his grace; back to unity with one another.

Sin separates and isolates, but grace seeks you... because grace seeks unity.

Amen.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.

Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.

Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.

Reader 2: Receive our offerings.

Together: Receive us as your own.

Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26)

Reader 1: The Lord bless you and keep you.

Reader 2: The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

Reader 1: The Lord look upon you with favor...

Reader 2: And give you peace.

Together: Amen.

An Invitation for This Week

This week, I'd like you to start a pattern which incorporates several disciplines.

FAITH5 is a practice which has shaped the Behrens family for several years, and I believe your home can benefit too. The goal of FAITH5 is to have a faith conversation every night in every home. It only takes a few minutes, but it also takes practice and intentionality. Here's what FAITH5 entails:

Share Listen to one another share highs and lows from the day.

Read Read a verse or story from the Bible. If your home includes children, use a children's Bible. For older kids and adults, follow a devotion book or reading plan, but make sure to read from the Bible.

Talk Ask one another how your reading connects to your highs and lows.

Pray Pray for one another.

Bless Each person gets to bless each other person. Speak a promise of God to one another with a positive physical touch. You could say, "God loves you," and give a hug. You could say, "You're forgiven," and give a high five.

Spend 5 minutes each day this week sharing God's gifts of grace and unity!

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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