

Faith Practices: Cultivating Grace

Series Intro & Overview

We have spent the better part of the last five months talking about *faith*. Particularly faith in the lordship and living presence of Jesus, our Christ. Faith—a belief that shapes action—in Jesus who is King, ruler, in-control of, all things, who is alive, having overcome all things that oppose our humanity. Faith in this Jesus is meant to transform us, to change our very essence, the way we understand the world as well as how we live in it. This faith is meant to free us to live in the fullness of our humanity in relationship with God and towards one another without fear, envy, or oppression in selfless love.

Yet, we struggle with faith. I know this because the last several months of conversations have almost always come back to the theme of living in the reality of our faith, of our identity and union with Christ. Sometimes our struggles manifests in heart break and doubt—having perceived God and life with God one way we have experienced the difficulties of daily living and are **disillusioned** in our faith.

For others the struggle manifests in connecting the dots of faith and every-day life, career, family, purpose. Faith is important, but how does it not remain something separate from the ordinary. The question of how is faith more than personal belief leaves us feeling **disconnected** from God, one another, longing for something deeper and/or more experiential.

And yet, the most common manifestation of our faith struggle has been in the pursuit of clarity. Our faith—what we believe about God, how he works, what he expects of us and what we can expect from him—is tested as we pursue spouses, families, education, careers, preferences, and calling. As we grow restless in our waiting and confused in how we participate, our faith seems wanting, not strong enough to live on or **disoriented**, searching but not finding what we are looking for in God and his family.

How do we remain steadfast in our faith amidst the waves of disillusionment, disconnection and disorientation?

In his book *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning shares a story that I think will help us get to the answer:

“When the brilliant ethicist John Kavanaugh went to work for three months at ‘the house of the dying’ in Calcutta, he was seeking a clear answer as to how best to spend the rest of his life. On the first morning there he met Mother Teresa. She asked, ‘And what can I do for you?’ Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him.

‘What do you want me to pray for?’ she asked. He voiced the request that he had borne thousands of miles from the United States: ‘Pray that I have clarity.’

She said firmly, ‘No, I will not do that.’ When he asked her why, she said, ‘Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.’ When Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, she laughed and said, ‘I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God.’”

The simple answer to steadfastness is trust. I don't know about you but that is somewhat a letdown! I would love for the answer to have been something more tactile, more rhythmic, more visual than simple trust. Don't get me wrong, I know that trusting God is important, but it is also difficult; especially when my **expectations and experiences** leave me disillusioned, disconnected and disoriented.

And yet, my struggle is not new. The psalmist in Psalm 13 expresses **this longing for change of circumstance, connection and clarity with an answer only in trust** when he says,

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed over him,’ lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

It's important to recognize the goodness of the crying out. To recognize the need for the confession that we at times feel abandoned, confused, alone, overwhelmed. **For it is in the crying out that we are moved into something deeper, something surer: a relational, non-circumstantial trust of God's greatness and goodness.**

Trust comes as we cry out, over and over again! The cry of “How long?” most appropriately “How long O Lord?” in Scripture, *‘often escalating into a demand’*, as we hear in the Psalm, is really is a recognition of three things:

- 1) That something in our world, in this world is broken, missing, out-of-step, difficult, painful, confusing, unclear, a general dissatisfaction;
- 2) That there is an unbroken, complete, congruent, at-easy, joyous, clear; fully satisfied way of living;
- 3) That both are known, experienced, and brought into paradoxical alignment only in relationship to God.

Like Kavanaugh and the psalmist, we carry an anxiousness in our faith and a sorrow of dissatisfaction and disconnection in our faith. And like Kavanaugh and the psalmist, the answer to our plea for change of circumstance, easy connection, and unmistakable clarity is met with a firm but whimsical *‘No, this is exactly what you must let go of so that you can trust my child!’*

Whether your shout is to God to change the world or make your story more clear, there is a longing deep within that is crying “How long”, but it is important that we say not just “How long?” but “How long Oh Lord?”. For,

“The conviction is that God's action, not the world's action, is what we want to be involved in. *The world is not the context for dealing with God; God is the context for dealing with God (and the world).* In a world in which we are constantly subjected to dizzying disorientations, **worship is the act in which we are reoriented contextually.**

Worship is the essential and central act of the Christian. We do many other things in preparation for and as a result of worship: sing, write, witness, heal, teach, paint, serve, help, build, clean, smile. But the centering act is worship. ***Worship is the act of giving committed attention to the being and action of God.*** The Christian life is posited on the faith that God is in action. When we worship, it doesn't look like we are doing much—and we

aren't. We are looking at what God is doing and orienting our action to the compass points of creation and covenant, judgment and salvation."¹

It is our need for constant contextualizing, being reoriented to interpret the world through God, to recognize his intimate, detailed, merciful, faithful, just, overcoming, powerful, subtle-at-times, yet never ceasing presence moving all things forward. Thus the psalmist can cry out "How Long O Lord?" in the midst of inner and external turmoil, longing, with lack of clarity and with much confusion while also proclaiming; "I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me."

The psalmist knows something deeply. He has experienced the pain of this world—internally and externally—and rather than running from it, he has cried out. And **in his cry he has not received an answer but rather a presence, an awakening to the reality of abundance in the midst of quiet oppression.**

Our longing for more, is found not in clarity but trust. Not in our action but God's action. Not in change of circumstances but in worship: a committed, mutual relationship with God the Father in Jesus Christ.

Worship is not a once-weekly activity, but as we saw at the beginning of our conversations on faith, we recognized that worship is a way of life: a way of structuring life, understanding life, and living life that is reorienting. A mode of being that is the means and mark of growing up in Jesus, maturing as his disciples (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 5).

A NEW METEAPHOR

Trusting God and growing in doing so in our ordinary days through a life style of worship is not a new concept for most of us. Yet, it is a struggle. Because our struggle is real and because this information, as true as it might be, is not new to us; perhaps a shift in metaphor or image, actually two comparative metaphors, would help us enter a more formative story. Why?

Well...

"...metaphors [are] *words that occur at the intersection of the visible and invisible* [, and are] especially necessary when we take seriously the life of faith in the circumstances of ordinary day-to-day living, **circumstances in which the visible and invisible are continuously contiguous.** [After all,] Jesus used a lot of metaphors."²

Why do you think Jesus used metaphors? Perhaps he was aware of what modern scholars argue, that metaphors are,

"mapping across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience, and our everyday language.' These potent words shape the way we know and how we act. They also enhance our spirituality [our holistic engagement with the God who makes himself known]: **'Through metaphor, the vividness, intensity, and meaningfulness of ordinary experience becomes the basis of passionate spirituality.'** [For we have all

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 141.

² Eugene Peterson, introduction to *The Cultivated Life* by Susan Phillips, 9.

experienced some part of a metaphor, something in the image we have seen, touched, smelt, tasted, or heard.] Metaphors breathe life and understanding into our lives of faith by bridging the conscious and unconscious, the immanent and the transcendent...**Practices shape and are shaped by metaphors.** We bow down to a monarch and follow a shepherd. Perhaps we take particular actions to get out and stay out of a rut, or we engage in disciplines that keep us ice-hard in a culture that would melt us. The story flows.”³

And perhaps that’s the key. **Metaphors help keep us in the flow of the story.** They help keep us in God’s Story even as we are being pulled externally and internally to live in a story alongside God’s Story at best or in conflict with his at worst. After all,

“Life has a story shape. The life of the Spirit is necessarily relational, always relational. **The most adequate rendering of the way things are is through storytelling...**Everything and anything can be put into the story. And from the moment it is in the story it develops meaning, participates in plot, becomes, somehow or other, significant. The entire biblical revelation comes to us in the form of story. Nothing less than story is adequate to the largeness and intricacy of the truth of creation and redemption.

Our biblical ancestors in the faith were magnificent storytellers. The stories they told reverberate down through the corridors of worshiping communities and resonate in our hearts as sharply in tune with reality as when they were first told. **They map the country of our humanity, show its contours, reveal its dimensions.**

Mostly what they show is that to be human means to deal with God.

And that everything we encounter and experience—birth and death, hunger and thirst, money and weapons, weather and mountains, friendship and betrayal, marriage and adultery, every nuance and detail of it—deals with God.”⁴ (Peterson in Phillips, 12)

We are not good story people. Our modern, western world, even our Christian sub-culture, is conditioned to not take story for what it is and can be in the flourishing of our life with God; but rather, we tend to **reduce it** through dissection and technicality, **dismiss it** through a prejudicial exaltation of the modern mind, or **neuter it** through sifting out only the principles and ethics.

“Stories suffer misinterpretation when we don’t submit to them simply as stories. **We are caught off guard when divine revelation arrives in such ordinary garb** and think it’s our job to dress it up in the latest Paris silk gown of theology or outfit it in a sturdy three-piece suit of ethics before we can deal with it. The simple, or not so simple, story is soon, like David outfitted in Saul’s armor, so encumbered with moral admonitions, theological constructs and scholarly debates that it can hardly move.”⁵

And so our faith struggles to remain steadfast, to draw us into more and more of God’s Story and our humanity. Theology, doctrine, ethics are not evil things, they are, as the writer of Hebrews bluntly reminds us, simply the elemental things meant to lead us into an intimate maturity with God the Father (Heb. 5:12-6:3).

Metaphors are given then to keep us encapsulated in the ever expansive Story of God’s world in which we find ourselves. Metaphors that shape the way we know and the way we live. **Metaphors that keep us from devolving into**

³ Susan Phillips, *The Cultivated Life*, 19.

⁴ Peterson in *The Cultivated Life*, 12.

⁵ Ibid. 13-14.

ideas about God; reading and talking about God while being unaware of the actual presence of God with us, and that the people he has placed in our lives to love are right in front of us.

The two metaphors that I believe will help us discover and keep attentive to a life of ordinary worship are: **Circus and Garden**.

These two comparative metaphors, I hope will both resonate and as well as direct us into a way of knowing, being known by and making God known over this next season of our life together in God's Story. They are meant to awaken us to both the presence and purposes of God as well as the counter realities that exasperate our historical struggle to trust God. So, let's look life in the circus and the garden.

THE CIRCUS

The world in which we live as sons and daughters, friends and neighbors, wives and husbands, employees and employers, the church family; is like a **CIRCUS**. Sociologist, psychologist, and spiritual mentor, Susan Phillips contends that **the circus life** is a three-ringed event in which you are either a *passive observer*, or a *mastered performer*; a life of fragmentation and yet constant motion.

"Circus is a social metaphor that brings to mind the complexity of activity in a three-ring setting under the big tent, *everything going on at once*. A circus is the place to see performers doing funny things, dangerous things, clowns and trapeze artist, lion tamers and people shot out of a cannon—all of this without our participation...**[Until it is time to preform your act, your work, your identity, your part in the production for consumption]**...In an age of distraction that proliferates with every new technical device, the circus metaphor keeps us aware of the necessity of making alert discernments that will keep us from depending on entertainment and frenzy to compensate for an inner emptiness."⁶

There is no space in the circus life to rest, to contemplate, to be removed from distraction. When you are simply the observer you are being pinged at every moment in a variety of ways, allowing no room for depth of experience. And then you are quickly pulled into the role of performer in which you are now expected to entertain and by which you find your satisfaction but only as long as the crowd approves and always in comparison to what else is going on around you in the other rings.

The movement from performer to spectator creates a shallowness of our humanity; desiring to veg-out or peddle faster. This constant juggling creates in us an anxiousness and enviousness.

"We are anxious in a lonely crowd, and we're also envious. No longer do we compare ourselves only to our neighbor [thou shalt not covet!], but **we evaluate our lives in comparison to people viewed on broadcast and social media**. As we sit in the seats of our culture's circus, the lives of the rich and famous are in full electronic view, and so are the triumphs of Facebook 'friends.' To get ahead we preform by juggling and balancing, launching and pounding. Then we assume the spectator posture and veg out, channel surf [, bing watch] and quell our anxious striving by ingesting whatever helps us turn off, zone out and graze."⁷

⁶ Ibid. 10.

⁷ Phillips, 24.

In the circus, humanity is reduced as our anxiousness is increased and our measurement of satisfaction is always being repositioned.

“In the circus the focus is on heroic feats [big changes, diets, changing the world] rather than the development of persons and relationships. Similarly, in the **presentism of our culture**, what’s significant is what you’ve done lately and, perhaps, posted. *The rapid movement from one spectacle to another allows no time to reflect and explore.* One snapshot event or image on a screen succeeds the other, **mesmerizing but not cohering** as a narrative. **No journey is undertaken, nothing is planted and grown.** There is no history in the circus.”⁸

This lack of history means there is a lack of story. There is no plot in the ever continuous circus. **No beginning, no end, no rhythm allowing for stability, rest, healing, etc.** The lack of narrative produced in the constant juggle of performing and spectating is at the heart of both our internal cries for ‘How long’ and the perpetuation of the just yet godless cries for justice as a society and world in 2016,

“Alternating between those stances takes a toll on us all, personally and relationally, culturally and spiritually. **Self-awareness and compassion fade** in the glare of the footlights and the shadow of the bleachers. **What story are we living** in the three rings of the marketplace [as consumers], workplace [as producers], and cyberspace [as avatars living a non-real life of comparison]?”⁹

Circus living is not sustainable in either action or affection. Eventually it wears at us emotionally, mentally, physically as well as spiritually. Regardless of our religion. Current authorship on work and life balance from psychologist to business and leadership experts demonstrate humanities recognition of the un-health of circus living. In fact, a cover shot of the Harvard Business Review illustrates the point well!

You cannot be both a performer and a spectator in constant rotation. But, the answer is not to simply chose one over the other—which it oft our habit. The irony of such thought is that we still remain in the circus; the same environment which fosters unhealthy.

Simply choosing a role does not change the story. Rather;

we need a new image to shape the way we live.



⁸ Ibid. 26-27.

⁹ Ibid. 27.

THE GARDEN

The metaphor of circus describes the tension of culture; a cry of 'how long', but doesn't provide a direction for flourishing, a cry that also comes with 'O Lord', something more foundational and sure. So, we need another metaphor: the **GARDEN**.

Why a garden? Well, our faith story begins in a garden (Gen. 2:8). In fact, it was the cultivation within the garden so that it might spread over all the earth that was the primary work of humanity (Gen. 2:15). The task was to participate in the growth of the garden until all the earth found both order and flourishing in the presence of our good creator God and his image bearers. For a garden, is not simply the 'natural' growth of vegetation, but an **intentionally crafted environment made for beauty, enjoyment, and fruitfulness: i.e. flourishing.**



To live in the garden was to live with God, to do the work God had formed for us to participate in, to enjoy the relationships God had crafted for us to share in, to experience abundance without conflict, over indulgence, envy, hoarding, oppression or selfish withholding.

The atmosphere of the story changes however, when humanity was removed from garden (3:22-24) and life outside the garden bore fruit that seemed to counter flourishing (Gen.4-6). And thus, the metaphor of a garden, especially a return, has been an encouragement to our faith family throughout history,

"For the Lord comforts Zion; he converts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song." (Is. 51:3)

"The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." (Is. 58:11)

"For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as the garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all the nations." (Is. 61:11)

"They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the heard; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more." (Jer. 31:12)

"And they will say, 'This land that was desolate shall be tilled...This land that was desolate shall become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'" (Ezek. 36:34-35)

"Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old." (Micah 7:14)

"I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit." (Amos 9:14)

Even Jesus, when describing the Kingdom of God, referred to it as a mustard seed, a small seed planted in a garden, outgrowing all else in the garden (Matt. 13:31-32). Likewise the seeds of the Kingdom—the presence and rule of God—would only bear fruit that reproduced 30, 60 and 100 fold—flourishing—when it was planted in good soil, in a tilled, cultivated context (Matt. 13:18-23, 36-43) much like a garden!

The garden is a metaphor for an intentionally crafted life in the presence and purposes of God. A story of life that has seasons, allows for participation but not control, and to which there is purpose in both life, death and rebirth.

COMPARING METEAPHORS

We need two metaphors to keep help us make worship normal, ordinary and transformative. Specifically, **we need to metaphors that help us compare and contrast the stories we find ourselves living.** A part of our struggle with faith is that we fail to recognize the contending stories and thus easily succumb to the one which is often most prevalent in our culture.

When we look at the stories of the circus and the garden and the life that each produces; we see there are certainly similarities but also clear differences. For instance,

In both the circus and the garden there are many activities happening at once. Both are lively! You cannot have a garden with a single plant nor a circus with a single act.

Yet, in the circus the abundance of activity is meant to distract, to overwhelm, to move at high-speed in order to entertain as to keep the spectators attention and affection, and keep the performers busy with production. In the garden, the activity is seasonal, most of the time requiring participation and patience.

In both the circus and the garden there are many things happening behind the scenes to produce what is seen. Whether behind the tent or under the dirt!

Yet, in the circus the behind the scenes activity is simply another form of repetitive work in either practice to preform or logistics for others to perform. While in the garden, what happens where we cannot see allows the gardener to rest, to trust, and to appreciate what cannot be controlled.

In both the circus and the garden everyone is included. Yet, in the circus your role is limited to performer (or one who helps performers preform) or spectator. Act-crash, Entertain-be entertained, Run-Veg Out; is the rhythm. In the garden **participation requires attentiveness**, various tasks at various times but in due season; as ones who know and work with the life of the garden and thus enjoys in interdependence and mutuality. You do not preform for the garden nor simply observe the garden—you have to get dirty and at the same time get to experience the fruit of labor; not simply the applause.

Both metaphors provide a vivid picture of a way of life. One pictures life as constantly moving but going nowhere, telling no story but full of entertainment and performances to partake in. The other pictures life as seasonal, rhythmic, interdependent and participatory. So the question is, which metaphor are we living into? **Or better yet, which metaphor are we cultivating!**

CULTIVATING AS PARTICIPATING

Susan Phillips comments that,

“To experience is to encounter or undergo something, and we are always being shaped by our experience, whether we’re aware of the process [or not]. Certain experiences, through impact and frequency, *cultivate* us in deep ways...Some *cultivation* is chosen, some inflicted and some merely sustained. **We are always being cultivated.**”¹⁰

Cultivation is always a process to which we are subjected. Much like the circus, it is a reality that is not always of our making, but of which we cannot avoid even if we fail to discern and acknowledge. We are all caught up in the circus life and are therefore being cultivated to produce certain ways of living, expectations and measurements of life, even faith.

Yet, if we recognize that the story in which we are living cultivates us and if we discern with wisdom what leads to flourishing and what does not, then cultivation can be something not done to us but to which we become active participants (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 5:12-6:3; Eph. 5:15-17; Gal. 5:16-25).

Cultivation is simply the process of participating in gardening. It refers primarily to providing the necessary environment for plants to flourish. The actions like tilling, planting seeds, watering, pulling weeds, pruning, providing shade or warmth, etc. Over time, the concept of cultivation has been applied to humans and societies, to the work of fostering a particular environment in order to help produce a particular mind, ideology, or humanity.

Gardeners do not “make” things grow, they participate with the natural process of growth through cultivating. Life is in the seed and cultivating is the process of participating in the flourishing of life.

In spiritual terms, we are cultivating grace.

For it is by grace we are saved, healed, and made to flourish in the Spirit (Eph. 2:1-10). It is grace in us and through us that produces a life of abundance (Jn. 10:1-18), the fruit of God’s grace building us into his dwelling (Eph. 2:11-22) as we are led by his Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25), strengthened by his Spirit (Eph. 3:14-21), united by his Spirit (Eph. 4:1-7), and as we rest in his love; responding in gracious obedience (Jn. 15:1-17).

The concept of cultivation is necessary for us to participate in our faith:

...**without disillusionment**—expecting everything to be easy or having a naïve view of the world and God

...**without disconnection**—beginning to see God in everything and everything for and to God—and

...**without disorientation**—centering our reality on relationally experienced trust; the presence of God with us.

If we believe that we alone bear fruit then we become ones who live out of guilt or condemning as we can neither live up to our expectations or judge others according to them. If we believe God alone bears the fruit as we simply “be”, then we fail to participate in the depth of our humanity and live selfishly in a “if God wills it” apathy that keeps us from bearing one another’s burdens.

CULTIVATING GRACE allows us to practice our faith without comparison, without control, without disappointment as we learn to trust God in the everyday; worshiping him in the ordinary. This is the paradox of John 15:1-17. That fruit is borne through us as we are connected to Jesus and yet our connection is loving obedience to the one who has transformed who we are and freed us to see God and the world in a way that leads us to sacrifice and service.

¹⁰ Ibid. 21.

When we have a picture of life as a garden in which we participate through cultivating—not taking more responsibility than is ours nor taking less—our faith will grow in steadfastness, depth, and joy in the presence and pattern of our Father together.

HOW WE CULTIVATE

“Cultivation is an agricultural metaphor: working the soil to prepare it to grow something useful—planting and watering seeds, weeding and pruning, harvesting....In an age of self-absorption, cultivation is a metaphor that can keep us aware that we are **not merely individuals defined by what we consume or possess or do but by our relationships, our values, and our faith, all of which require attentiveness.**”¹¹

Over the coming months we will be looking at different FAITH PRACTICES of our church family throughout history that will help us cultivate grace—recognize the presence of God—in our everyday lives as employees, neighbors, parents, friends, and the church. These practices are *disciplines*, activities that help us remain attentive to our values, our faith, and our God. The ideas of these disciplines are helpful to know, but like gardening,

it will actually take working out of these practices over seasons of life to see reproducing fruit.

The FAITH PRACTICES that we will be both learning and living over this next season are:

PRAYING THE PSALMS	Learning to answer God who has always been and is always there.
PRACTICING REPENTANCE	Regularly confessing our need for and clinging tightly to Jesus.
LISTENING	Positioning ourselves to recognize grace in everyday conversations.
STOPPING	Removing ourselves from the circus life, even in the middle of it!
MINDFULNESS	Increasing our awareness of God’s company and resolutions.
SABBATH KEEPING	Countering the rhythm of circus life with restoration and enjoyment.
FRIENDSHIP	Recognizing the grace in good friends and the need to work for them.
NURTURING	Cultivating grace in one another.
COMMUNION	The dialectical sustenance of life from death.

¹¹ Peterson, *The Cultivated Life*, 10.

HOPES FOR THE SERIES

Susan Phillips summarizes the heart behind this series well when she says,



“The cultivated life is one of *persevering in our longing*. In the garden...*grace collaborates with dedication*. Our completion [in Christ] comes toward us as we move toward it...Spiritual completion is **not** a matter of willfully straining after an ideal. It is, rather, **a relational fullness of life that is forever unfolding and developing**, like the way tree trunks thicken as sun, water and nutrients are imbibed. In our living, we aren’t supposed to come to the end of our growing, or even of heartfelt yearning for it. Nor are we to become independent pursuers of growth...Through the lens of cultivation, we see our lives taking place in God’s garden.”¹²

Our hope over the next several months is that the *metaphor of the garden* and the *practice of cultivating* would help each of us individually and our Gospel Communities as Christ City Church:

- 1) Persevere in our longing for God
- 2) Create a picture of life with God that gives depth to our daily lives
- 3) Encourage practices that keep us steadfast in our transformative and freeing faith

May we,

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” (Psalm 100)

Amen!

¹² Phillips, 35, 37, 19.