

Five Spiritual Practices for Life — Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe — Acts 2:29-39, 42-47

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Hey Life Groups!

I'm resuming the **Life Group Questions**. This one's shorter because: (1) It's a standalone sermon and not part of a series. For the fall, we're resuming 1 Corinthians 8-11. (2) There's a Prayer Summit, and we're encouraging all groups to attend it.

Prayer Summit is on Wednesday (September 10) at 7 pm. The Café will sell dinner from 5:00 to 6:30, so come early for an affordable and tasty meal! Please join us in seeking God together as we begin this ministry season.

Intro to Community will be on October 5. It's an info session for Life Group applicants. We want them to understand the purpose and commitments involved so they'll know why they're joining. If they're looking for something else, we can point them in the right direction.

Monthly Theme Bookmarks will be handed out at the Life Group Fall Fest kiosk. Each month has a theme with some things to do. There's a QR code for a page where everything's fleshed out. It can add some additional directions or angles of growth throughout the year.

QUESTIONS AND NOTES

Check out the Questions with Notes and Commentary to dig deeper: <http://willingdon.org/lifegroups/leaders-corner/>.

1. **Pastor Ray said, "Every one of us must hear the Word of God, turn from sin, and turn to Jesus; that is, receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and entrust our lives to Him and His good purposes. Today, we see this personal surrender and transformation symbolized through water baptism." If you've been baptized, what led you to it? If you haven't been baptized, what's holding you back?**

It's all too easy to think that someone can be a Christian through association. Many people think that because their parents are Christian or they live within a Christian society, they are automatically considered Christian as well. For example, my son was born in Canada, so he is an automatic Canadian (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-29/section-3.html>). Because my wife is a Taiwanese citizen, she was able to get him Taiwanese citizenship. Without any awareness or effort on his part, my son has the identity, rights, and privileges of being a dual citizen.

But we can't inherit a relationship with Jesus. We must respond to God's Word and turn from sin towards Jesus. Although baptism doesn't save us, it's a step we take to demonstrate our allegiance to Jesus.

Some of us may be reluctant to get baptized. I've heard many people say they aren't "there" yet. As they explained what they meant, it was clear they thought they had to be a model Christian first. In reality, baptism is a beginner step.

Medical school students often have a White Coat Ceremony when they begin studying medicine (<https://www.ama-assn.org/medical-students/medical-school-life/meaning-behind-your-white-coat>). It doesn't mean they're a fully trained doctor, but that they're on their way to becoming one. Baptism means you're on your way to being more like Jesus.

2. If anyone in your group hasn't been baptized, what can your Life Group do to encourage them?

Here are some suggestions:

Demystify It. Yes, it's a very special event. Yes, it means a lot. But let's not get carried away. Unless our elders have made some updates to our position papers, baptismal candidates don't need to perform three miracles or memorize the Bible. Baptisms don't mean you'll come out of the water a completely different person or a perfect representation of Jesus. You don't need an angel to visit you at night three times to know if baptism is for you. Let people know what it is and isn't.

Share Your Story. Tell them why you got baptized. What made you want to take that step? Was it something someone said, like a sermon or testimony? Or maybe a realization about where your life was headed or how you wanted to grow?

Answer Questions. If they have questions about baptism, do your best to answer them. Don't worry if they leave you stumped. Say, "That's a good question. Let's look into it!"

Share the Gospel. Baptism is a response to hearing the Good News about Jesus. You can't respond to something you've never heard before (Romans 10:14). Many Life Groups have gone through *What Is the Gospel* by Greg Gilbert. It's a great book that covers the essentials of the Gospel in an approachable way. Leaders can borrow a copy from our Life Group Leader Library to use for their group.

E-mail Pastor Angus. Pastor Angus oversees our church's baptism process. If people want to pursue baptism or have questions about the process, they can email him: asheung@willingdon.org.

3. How can you (as a group and as an individual) devote yourself to following spiritual rhythms?

The early Christians didn't take it lightly. The verb devote is προσκαρτερέω (proskartereo) in Greek and means "busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, be devoted to" (BDAG). It can also be translated as "committed" (MSG). It means they took things seriously.

How can your group also commit to it? Here are some suggestions.

Be Informed. Learn what spiritual rhythms are. What does it look like to follow Jesus and why? Many Life Groups have gone through *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis. If your group would like to, we have copies available for leaders to borrow. There are also FREE, official PDFs of the book (<https://document.desiringgod.org/habits-of-grace-en.pdf>) and workbook (<https://document.desiringgod.org/habits-of-grace-study-guide-en.pdf>).

Commit Together. Agree to do it together as a group. Don't just assume it. Map it out. What will it look like for your group to do this communally? What can you all agree to do? How will you hold each other accountable?

Ask Other Groups. Talk to other groups and see what they're doing. Hopefully, you can get some ideas from them. Return the favor and share some ideas.

Talk About Benefits. Life is busy. Things can be hard. Share about the gains and rewards. Looking forward to experiencing God more, gaining a foundation of God's Word, or growing closer to each other. These are great motivations to help you keep going.

- 4. Pastor Ray said, "The church is a living, interconnected organism, with its members intimately connected, created to experience life together – Spirit-filled people singing together, participating in the Lord's Supper together, praying together." How can your group experience worship together?**

How can you worship together on Sunday morning? Can you sit together during the service or encourage each other to be on time? Pray together before the service to prepare your hearts.

Take elements from Sunday morning and integrate them into your weekly gatherings. If you don't do it already, sing together. If nobody in your group can lead, just look up the song on YouTube. You can celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

- 5. Pastor Ray said, "Wonders and signs were happening, confirming the work that God was doing in the city. When God is present, there are kingdom signs and wonders. But the awe was fruit of the new believers' devotion to God's Word and to one another." For this ministry year, what kind of miraculous fruit would you like to see in your group?**

Often, we associate wonders and signs and miracles with breaking the laws of science. Cancer suddenly going into remission, events converging to make the impossible happen, or even a supernatural voice. Here, the miracle is people being changed by the Holy Spirit to follow Jesus and be more like Him.

What would that look like for your group? Perhaps it's picking up the regular habit of reading God's Word. That would be an awesome win if someone started and kept up a Bible reading routine! Or maybe members stepping up to care for each other, instead of leaving it up to the leaders. They can start inviting people out for coffee just to see how they're doing, or go the extra mile to make meals for people struggling with something. For some groups, it could be members' attitudes shifting from Life Group being optional to a high priority. People start caring and contributing to the group. Another huge area could be people confessing sins to the group and seeking freedom from those sins. It's always awesome to see people becoming free from the sins they're entangled in.

6. How do we respond to VUCA moments with VUCA?

The bad VUCA:

Volatility. Things are constantly changing in surprising ways. New wars and conflicts always seem imminent. We're always on the brink of something drastic and scary.

Uncertainty. We have no idea what the future holds. Who knows what this or that world leader will do? Will such a policy be successful or fail? Will there be another pandemic or world war?

Complexity. Everything is so intertwined. This global event and that policy somehow impact the job market, our retirement, and the increased cost of groceries and rent. Things aren't simple. Issues often have multiple sides.

Ambiguity. What's the truth? What is right or wrong? Meanings and morals keep changing. What's the truth behind the headlines? What should we do in response to what's going on? Things feel so unclear.

The good VUCA:

Vision of God (Awe). Keep an eye on God. Be so amazed that you can't keep your eyes off of Him (Matthew 14:22-33).

Understanding of God's Word. Know what God's Word says (and doesn't). Understand His instructions and promises. Learn about His big plan and purpose.

Clarity of the Gospel. Anchor yourself in the Gospel. Knowing the Gospel explains a lot of what's going on. For example, remembering that all humans are sinful (Romans 3:23) keeps us from wondering why the whole world is so crazy. We deserve God's wrath just as much as any dictator or criminal. And remember that people can only change by God's grace through the Holy Spirit's heart-changing work through Jesus' death on the cross. It helps us run to Him instead of trying to fix the world ourselves. And we know that those causing chaos need Jesus' grace no more or less than we do.

Assurance of God's Presence. When things are bad, we remember that God is with us. He's eager to help us. Sometimes it's through reading His Word or being with His family. Somehow, God shows up. Seek Him and patiently wait.

7. How can your Life Group be a "squad"?

Life Groups are more than just a group of friends or like-minded individuals. Pastor Ray said, "The members are seen as having each other's backs. They're on a mission together." If your group isn't a squad yet, what steps can you take to get there?

Pastor Ray said his group supported him and Judy by "praying, providing meals, texting, providing support, and encouraging." How can your group be there to support each other and encourage each other to follow Jesus? What needs does your group have that can be filled by your members? If you have needs, share what they are.

What gifts or strengths has God equipped your group, and how can you use them for each other? Point out what you see in each other and suggest ways they can benefit the group.

If you feel your group isn't being a squad towards you, what can you do to get the ball rolling? How can you step up so others can follow?