

INWARDLY DIGEST

THE PRAYER BOOK AS GUIDE TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE

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Praise for *Inwardly Digest*:

The Prayer Book as Guide to a Spiritual Life

Too often, *The Book of Common Prayer* is open to a few familiar pages on Sunday and closed the rest of the days, with little regard to the deep, transformative spirituality inside. With humor, deep reverence, and academic insight that is anything but dry and boring, Derek Olsen reminds us of the breath of the Spirit, the lives of the saints, the love of Jesus, and the magnificence of God held in the words, silence, and worship of our *Book of Common Prayer*. Clergy and laity should read this to discover and re-discover the daring words and liturgies of our faith spanning eons and to engage the prayers and worship of our faith.

—LAURIE BROCK

Episcopal priest and author of *Horses Speak of God: How Horses Can Teach Us to Listen and be Transformed*

Derek Olsen is the patron saint of the overlooked; campaign manager of the undervalued; tour guide to the taken for granted. His patient, scholarly watchfulness and his gift for rendering complex ideas in clear, concise prose make *Inwardly Digest* an insightful guide to *The Book of Common Prayer* and a sure and steady introduction to Anglican spiritual practice.

—JIM NAUGHTON

Founder of Episcopal Café and
partner of Canicle Communications

Written in an engaging style that is both conversational and informative, *Inwardly Digest* is a timely invitation to life in the Spirit sustained by the patterns and rhythms of the Prayer Book.

—FRANK GRISWOLD
25th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church

With the spiritual foundation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Derek Olsen shows how everyday Christians can grow closer to God through a “training regimen” that incorporates the spirituality of Anglican liturgy as a daily practice. In straightforward and accessible writing, Olsen provides a guide to Prayer Book spirituality for everyone.

—THE REV. SUSAN BROWN SNOOK
Episcopal priest and editor of *Acts to Action: The New Testament's Guide to Evangelism and Mission*

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DEREK OLSEN

FORWARD MOVEMENT
CINCINNATI, OHIO

spurred by Jim Naughton when he was still running the online *Episcopal Café*. Parts of the seventh chapter started life as an address to the Society of Catholic Priests at the instigation of David Cobb and Robert Hendrickson.

Once the book concept became more clear, I blogged much of it as I went, and I owe a debt of gratitude to all of the readers who commented and improved what I wrote. In particular, Barbara Snyder, Christopher Evans, and Nicholas Heavens have been there from the start. Susan Loomis, too, continually pushed me to write more clearly and to remember for whom I was writing. Brendan O'Sullivan-Hale and Hollis Powell, hosts of *The Collect Call* podcast, read and improved the chapter on collects. In addition to my Internet comrades, Brooke Watson and Steven Dalle Mura (my uncle-in-law) commented on every page in order to make this a better and more accessible work.

And finally, dear readers, I invite you to continue the conversations—in your homes, your parishes, and your Internet communities. I've renamed my blog to the more user-friendly *St Bede Productions* (www.stbedeproductions.com), and you're always welcome to join us there.

Derek Olsen, PhD
Feast of Saint Bede

CHAPTER 1

FUNDAMENTALS

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

My wife is, among other things, a coach with our local running club. Runners come to her and complain that they don't feel like they are making progress. Her first question is, "What's your goal?" Whether it's maintaining a certain pace for a number of miles, setting a new personal record for a given race, or losing a few pounds, there has to be a goal. Otherwise the idea of progress is a futile one! Whether they have a goal or not, she then asks to see their running log. Well—they haven't filled it out. Or they have, and it shows sporadic workouts scattered across a couple of weeks. Or the log shows consistency but no differentiation between types of workouts. With the log in hand, she can coach the runners to develop training plans that will help them get to their goal. She helps the runners establish a connection between their daily and weekly training and the accomplishment of their

longer-term goal. Then they understand: The training has to be tailored to the goal.

The practice and metaphor of physical training has been connected with the process of spiritual development since the ancient world.¹ It takes the same kind of discipline and consistency to progress in the spiritual life as it does in physical fitness. Indeed, the technical term for the theory and practice of spiritual development is “ascetical theology” taken from the Greek word *askesis* that simply means training.

Paul taps into the language of physical training (and running specifically) when he speaks to the Corinthians of his own self-disciplines: “Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-7). Paul reminds us that we have to have a goal. Not only that, but also we have to understand and believe that our training is directly contributing to our attainment of that goal.

There is a disconnect between the way most people approach their spiritual lives and how they approach a project like getting in shape to run a marathon. When you’re working on such a project, there are concrete tasks to accomplish; there’s a goal to work toward, and success can be measured by progress against that goal. We don’t tend to think of prayer and meditation in the same way; you can’t see it taking shape—you cannot check off the workouts or mark off the dates on the calendar as the big day approaches. Yet just because spirituality cannot be easily measured does not mean that there aren’t steps toward progress. Anglican spiritual writer Martin Thornton reminds us that there is one true test

of an effective spiritual practice: Does it make me a more loving person?²

The use of “training” language doesn’t work for everyone; it’s not the only metaphor that the Church has used for this kind of work. If it doesn’t work for you, consider other metaphors. For example, one can speak of relaxing into the person of God, an approach that doesn’t use the language of effort and progress. This path recognizes that a relationship with God isn’t something we have to create; it already exists. It frames spiritual growth as a process of clearing away impediments that prevent us from experiencing this relationship as fully as possible. Another classic metaphor is that of healing. We are sick with sin and need to be restored to full health in our relationship with God and with all of creation.

I am using the training language because it has a long and significant history in the Church. I also think it is a concept that connects with many people in today’s world. Use the other metaphors if they work better for you. These three perspectives share three implicit assumptions: 1) God already loves us and is reaching out to us in a variety of ways, 2) the state that we are in now needs to be transformed by God, through God, and toward God, and yet 3) we have a role in this process as well. At the very least, we have to be attentive to the action of God’s graces leading us toward love and the practices of being more loving.

At the end of the day, this is what we are created for. We have been created in the image and likeness of God. At the beginning of our making, before even the first cells of our bones were constructed, God framed us in his own image. A God-shaped pattern lies at the heart of our being. As scripture and tradition have revealed again and again, God’s own character is rooted in love, justice, mercy, and fidelity. The psalms struggle to use the immensity of creation to

describe the character of God: "Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep; you save both man and beast, O Lord" (Psalm 36:5-6). These same attributes of love, justice, mercy, and fidelity were woven into our being before the cords of our sinews were knit. Where are they now? As beings created to love and serve God and one another, are we in touch with this fundamental pattern?

Truthfully, we fall far short of the promise of God's pattern for us. We don't consistently manifest the characteristics that have been built into us. This is the result of sin. Through our own choices, through the choices of others, through the choices that society makes and heaps upon us, we lose sight of who and what we are. We invest ourselves in stories at odds with God's story, stories about riches and success and fame where what matters is getting ahead. Or perhaps our stories are about needs and hungers and habits where what matters is quieting the cravings...until they kick up again. We invest ourselves in patterns of life, in ways of living, that are skewed from the pattern that God has laid down for us, patterns grounded in something other than love and faithfulness.

One central point of Christian spirituality, then, is to recall us to ourselves. It is to reconcile us to the God who loves us, who created us in his own image, and who cared enough for our redemption to take frail flesh and demonstrate the patterns of love, mercy, and justice in the person of Jesus Christ—patterns that led him through the cross to resurrection. In Jesus, in God's ultimate act of self-revelation and of self-emptying for our sake, we have been called back; we can get in touch with the "us" that God originally created us to be. Therefore, the true test of a Christian spirituality is whether it helps us address this question and accomplish our goal: Are we free to love and to be who God created us to be?

But we can't stop there, either. The Christian enterprise isn't just about us individually. While God cares deeply about the redemption of each one of us, there is a much bigger scope in view here. God wills the redemption of all humanity, of all creation. Our spiritual work isn't just about being the best we can be—it's about participating in God's monumental effort to reconcile all creation back to the patterns of love, justice, mercy, and fidelity, back to the goodness that it had once and can have again.

To put it another way, Paul reminds us again and again in his letters that we have been baptized into the Body of Christ. He means this in a mystical sense—that we are connected to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—but he means it socially as well—that we are connected to the community of all the others who have been connected to Jesus as well, the Church. But being incorporated into the Body is the beginning of the process, not its end. It's not enough to be grafted into the Body of Christ if we don't share in the Mind of Christ, which is laid out in the Christ-hymn of Philipians: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross..." (2:5-8). Ephesians reminds us that this is the point of the whole exercise; Christian spirituality isn't just about you. Rather, your spiritual success is tied to everyone else around you. Indeed, that's the point of the Church: "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ...But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into

Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (4:12-13; 15-16, *emphasis added*). We are not on this journey alone; our own spiritual maturity is tied up with how we model and encourage that maturity in others. Any spirituality or spiritual exercise that cuts us off or makes us feel superior to those around us is not being rightly used.

Thus, the goal of Christian spirituality is to bring the whole Body of Christ to Christian maturity. We do this by cultivating that maturity in ourselves, modeling it for others, and encouraging them in their own path. We build up the Body by using the gifts that we have been given. No matter how it may appear, Christianity is a team sport.

If that's the goal, then how do we get there? How do we measure our progress toward it? Well, this is a little more subjective. It is not like running; I can't see how I'm doing in the same way that I glance down at a running watch to check my pace or look at the path behind me to see how far I've come.

As Thornton suggests, the most reliable guide is an honest appraisal of how we treat those around us. Are we treating the inevitable provocations of daily life with anger and resentment or with patience and compassion? When I sit and ponder how my spiritual life is going, one of the best measures I know is to consider how my wife and kids might rate me. Am I being a more thoughtful and patient husband? Am I responding to their demands on my time in appropriate ways? And not just them. How would my coworkers answer the same questions?

The habits of devotion foster in us the habits of virtue. We are transformed—slowly and with a certain amount of inevitable backsliding—gradually toward the Mind of Christ. As disconnected as worship and virtue might appear from one another, both the wisdom of the Church and our own

experience will confirm it. I remember once being angry at my wife over some petty household argument—which I can't even remember now—and thinking that I couldn't bear to pray Evening Prayer. I knew that once I prayed, I would have better perspective and be more centered—and I would have to acknowledge that she was right!

I also want to offer a word of caution concerning another kind of measurement. Sometimes we get the sense that the point of spiritual devotions (or even church services and sacraments) is to feel uplifted or inspired. We say it "worked" if we felt the Spirit moving or if we felt a spiritual high. I am a firm believer in the presence and the movement of the Spirit. I have discerned it in liturgical worship, in free-church worship, in the sacraments, and outside of them as well. And yet I have also felt emotional states that seem much like the Spirit that passed quickly or were the result of some kind of emotional manipulation. You cannot manipulate the Spirit, and you can't manipulate long-term formation. The point of a solid devotional practice is not momentary surges of emotion; long-term formation and transformation is measured in years and decades. Sometimes good and worthwhile devotional practices will inspire us—and sometimes they may feel more like work for long stretches of time.

As we continue to think together about spirituality, I want you to keep all of this in the back of your mind: We are doing this for a reason. There is a purpose to all of this. There is a goal. We want to connect back to the God who calls us each by name. We want to align our priorities with his priorities. We want to make our individual stories part of his greater, larger, deeper story. We want to be transformed to be as he is, so that we might love as he does so that, so graced, we might better understand and express his love for us and for all of creation.

My wife tends to get annoyed when I just go out and run. "But what are you trying to accomplish?" she'll ask me. "I dunno," I respond. "I just need to get out there for a while."

She is trying to remind me that taking a run around the block to clear my head is fine. But if I am running with the idea that it is part of a whole-life plan to stay fit and healthy, this sort of aimless occasional activity really isn't moving toward that goal. Those who embrace this fitness thing as a lifelong discipline have in-seasons and out-seasons. They train for specific events to help them stay motivated, and above all, they have three interlocking tools to bring it all together: a set of workouts with a clear function and purpose, a training plan that works with their schedule, and a coach who alternately encourages them to work harder and to ease off as necessary.

These three tools—effective exercises, a training plan, and a coach—are just as essential for cultivating the spiritual life. We find our effective exercises within *The Book of Common Prayer*. Between its covers are a variety of different rites and devotions that give us the building blocks for a healthy and well-rounded spiritual life. We will talk about these specifically in the next section and throughout the rest of the book.

The training plan for the spiritual life is often called a "rule of life." *The Book of Common Prayer* contains an implicit rule of life and, I would suggest, using the book properly is an endeavor of claiming and incarnating this implicit rule of life. However, just like a lot of fitness plans, it is not something you can jump into all at once. It's best to work into this rule of life as you figure out how to integrate it into the demands of a busy modern life. Putting together a rule of life will help you do this. On one hand, like a training plan, it will give you a clear sense of what you need to do on certain days to get in the habit and to prepare you for the next steps. On the other hand, it will also prevent you from getting burned out if you

try to take on too much at once. In my experience, when I try to adopt a complex, involved training scheme all at once, I find that I'll keep up with it for a week or so, then it will all crumble, and I'll stop doing any of it! A good rule of life should guard against this. Each season you should review it, see what should be added, adjusted, or dropped. It will free you from the anxiety of needing to take on everything "right now" because it reminds you that more can be added later once you have a good routine established.

The best way to put together a rule of life, though, is in conversation with someone who knows what he or she is doing. The best athletes put together their training plans with the help of their coach. It's always helpful to have someone outside of your own thoughts, hang-ups, and excuses who can more objectively tell you when you need to work harder and when you need to go easier on yourself. This is the role of a spiritual director.

A good spiritual director will work with you, ask you direct and pointed questions (maybe ask to see your training log!), and help you put together a rule of life that will help advance your spiritual fitness, moving you on to your goals. Often your priest can help you with this—at least in the beginning stages—but some congregations and some dioceses have specifically trained people who have been doing this for a long time. If you are planning to be serious about your spiritual fitness, it makes sense to look for a spiritual director who can give you the direction that you need.

So let's dive in, and see how *The Book of Common Prayer* gives us this set of exercises that can help us shape an effective training plan for our spiritual lives.

The Book of Common Prayer

The Book of Common Prayer 1979 is the official worship resource for The Episcopal Church. On one hand, it stands in the tradition of the English and Scottish books of common prayer that stretches back to the middle of the sixteenth century. And this tradition flows from the great stream of the historic Western liturgy that can be traced to the Apostolic Age with notable periods of formation in the sixth and eighth centuries. On the other hand, *The Book of Common Prayer* is also influenced by the recent ecumenical Liturgical Renewal Movement fostered by the Roman Catholic Second Vatican Council (1962-65) that re-energized liturgical scholarship by looking at the fourth century—the earliest period of church history for which we have solid liturgical documentation. So it is a book with a very old heritage that has been updated with the best modern thinking about what the Early Church was up to.

The Book of Common Prayer stands at the very center of Anglican spirituality. It gives us our core spiritual exercises. Furthermore, it relates them to one another in a sensible fashion, providing a baseline implicit rule of life. As we unpack this, let us start with three fundamental statements about the prayer book from which everything else proceeds. First, the prayer book is best understood not as the Sunday service book, or even as a collection of services, but as a system of Christian formation. Second, this system with its interlocking cycles has a coherent spiritual purpose. Third, this system as enshrined in the successive books of common prayer is an essential part of what it means to participate in the Anglican tradition.

THE PRAYER BOOK SYSTEM

A well-rounded fitness plan doesn't just have one kind of exercise. Instead, there are different kinds of runs; some focus on speed, others focus on distance. And these, in turn, interact with other kinds of exercises—weight training and stretching and cross-training. Some exercises are best done in groups where you receive the support and participation of others. Some can—and perhaps should—be done by yourself. The prayer book is no different. There are a variety of services in it; some can be done by yourself, some require other people, and still others are intended to gather the whole community to do them right.

When we consider the Table of Contents of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we note that—broadly—there are three general kinds of services. First, there are those that take us on a life-cycle arc from birth to death and are chiefly of a pastoral nature (meaning that there's a particular event or life-experience that is bringing the priest and the people together at that moment). Thus, there are services that take us from Thanksgiving for the Birth of a Child to Baptism (infant baptism being typical, if not the norm), to Confirmation to Marriage to Reconciliation of a Penitent to Burial. Second, there are services that order our worship on a regular repeating basis. The liturgical round is made up of three components: the liturgical calendar where we reflect upon our central mysteries through the various lenses of the seasons of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and in his continuing witness in the lives of the saints; the Daily Office where we immerse ourselves in the scripture and psalms; and the Holy Eucharist where we gather on holy days to most perfectly embody the Body of Christ and receive the graces that the sacraments afford. Third, there are the services for ordaining and consecrating the clergy of the church: deacons, priests,

and bishops. (Sometimes these are conceptually grouped together and called the Ordinal.)

Of these three kinds of services, the second (the regular repeating ones) constitute the theological, spiritual, and practical heart of the prayer book. These are the Daily Offices (consisting of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline) and the Holy Eucharist (also called Holy Communion). However, they are dispersed through the book in such a way that their importance, their various elements, and their relationship are not easily identified. Grasping the content and nature of these services is the key to understanding the spiritual structure offered by the prayer book.

If the standard by which you measure the services of the church is Sunday morning, you might wonder why they are grouped together in this way. After all, one of the big shifts in the current prayer book is that Eucharist is the standard Sunday service while Morning Prayer used to be the primary one. It appears that one displaced the other, and functionally that is the case, but when we take a big step backward and get a bigger picture historically, we realize that this is a set of false options.

Indeed, the Sunday morning either/or is a relatively recent occurrence. The first Anglican prayer books replicated the Sunday morning pattern of services that they inherited from the Western liturgical tradition: Morning Prayer followed by the Great Litany followed by the Eucharist. All three were done one after the other. After the Reformation, the piece that got dropped was the consecration of the Eucharist itself; worshipers would do Morning Prayer, the Litany, and the Holy Communion service through the readings, sermon, creed, and prayers but then would stop. (Sometimes the Eucharist was only consecrated three or four times a year.) It wasn't until the late nineteenth century that a prayer book gave the

option of doing either Morning Prayer or Holy Communion. So the either/or had classically been a both/and.

If these services represent the basic exercises, how do they fit together? What is the implicit rule of life here?

The heart of the prayer book system is described in the first sentence of the first real section of the prayer book called *Concerning the Service of the Church*:

The Holy Eucharist, the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day and other major Feasts, and Daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as set forth in this Book, are the regular services appointed for public worship in the Church (p. 13).

Here in this sentence are the three key items that we identified above. The establishment of "the Lord's Day and other major Feasts" is determined by the Calendar; the Holy Eucharist and daily Morning and Evening Prayer alternate as central public services. The Eucharist is the central exercise for the feasts; the Daily Office is the central exercise for all of the other days.

Like the natural world, *The Book of Common Prayer* has seasons. However, rather than pointing to agricultural potential or lack thereof, the prayer book constructs time around the person of Jesus in a set of seasons referred to as the temporal cycle. These include seasons such as Advent and Lent. The sanctoral cycle (which celebrates the saints) is superimposed upon the year as a succession of static days mostly independent of the seasons. The way that the prayer book orders time, then, is supposed to tell us something about our priorities. Time itself is provided with a Jesus-colored lens.

Now we move to contemplate the Holy Eucharist and Daily Office. The liturgy of the Western Church—especially liturgy that partakes of a monastic spirit—can be described as (among other things) a disciplined and bounded encounter

with scripture. That is, under the early medieval monastic ideal—lifted up as a worthy pattern in the preface to the first prayer book in 1549—the scriptures were read in their entirety every year in the services of the Daily Office. The Eucharist could then cherry-pick small sections of text (known as pericopes) at its leisure, firm in the knowledge that—thanks to the constant repetition of scripture—the congregation would immediately recognize the proper text and recall its literary context.

Thus, the process of reading, hearing, and becoming familiar with scripture is located in the Daily Office with a special emphasis on the psalms. In Morning and Evening Prayer, the psalms—the garden from which the fruit of all the other scriptures may be plucked, as Athanasius put it—would be repeated regularly (weekly, monthly, or following the prayer book's seven-week cycle), and the bulk of scripture read through every year or two depending on how many lessons were used at Evening Prayer. This is fundamentally catechetical—it teaches. This pattern grounds us in the stories, the laws, the histories, and the laments of the people of God that illuminate and inform our own experiences. The biblical canticles within the Daily Office serve an important function too. They aren't just praise-bits stuck in with the “real” material; rather they are lenses and orienting devices to help us interpret the readings—especially the Song of Zechariah, the Song of Mary, and the Song of Simeon, canticles that have been part of the Offices for well over a thousand years.

The Eucharist, then, as it rolls through the seasons, offers us not only a weekly (or more frequent) experience of the grace of God but also allows us to hear and experience the Good News in several major modes: expectation, joy, enlightenment, penitence, celebration—the principle Christian affections. If the Office is primarily catechetical, the Eucharist is primarily mystical. That is, it leads us by experiences of

grace into the mystery of God and the relationship that God is calling us into with him and with the entire created order through him.

The final aspect of the prayer book system is that the Calendar, the Office, and the Eucharist all form us for a continual practice of personal prayer. While the prayer book gives us the words for our common prayer, these words likewise offer models for how we converse with God in our private and passing moments. This then is the prayer book's rule of life. But how, specifically, does such a rule of life help us get to the end goal of Christian spirituality?

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE PRAYER BOOK SYSTEM

The purpose of any spiritual system is to bring the practitioner and their community into a deeper relationship with God—to create a family of mature Christians. Through their increasing awareness of who God is, how much God loves them and all of creation, they translate the love they have been shown into concrete acts of love and mercy in the world around them. Different spiritual systems use a variety of strategies to accomplish this. One of the classic ones—referred to in Saint Paul's direction to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)—is the recollection of God. The idea here is that if we can continually keep in mind the goodness of God, the constant presence of God, and an awareness of the mighty works of God on behalf of us and others, then we will more naturally and more completely act in accordance with God's will and ways. Continual recollection is nearly impossible, but there are methods to help us in this habit.

A primary goal of liturgical spirituality—that is, spirituality that is grounded and formed by regularly repeated fixed

patterns of prayers, scripture, and ritual actions—is to create a disciplined recollection of God. Thus, if we specifically pause at central points of time—morning and evening; noon and night; Sundays and other holy days—to reorient ourselves toward God and the mighty acts of God, whether recalled to us through the scriptures or experienced by us through direct encounters with the sacraments, then this discipline will lead us toward a habitual recollection of God.

In the liturgical round, *The Book of Common Prayer* gives us specific moments to stop and orient our time and ourselves around the recollection of God. As a result, one of the most important parts of the book is the Daily Office section that provides forms for prayer at morning, noon, evening, and night. These prayer Offices are our fundamental tools for disciplined recollection; they provide the foundation for our spiritual practice. This foundation, then, is punctuated by the Eucharist on holy days (at the least). And, conceptually, this is how we should view Sundays—not the day of the week on which we go to church—but as a Holy Day that recurs on a weekly basis.

Committing ourselves to living out these patterns is what makes us a prayer book people. I can call myself a runner, but I can't earn that title unless I get out there and run. If I run once or twice a month, I am not really a runner, even if I want to be one—or want to see myself as one. The title is earned by doing it; it doesn't matter if I'm fast or slow, the point is whether I actually run. It's the same way with the prayer book. We have these cycles to use, to inhabit, if we want to be a prayer book people, a liturgical people. There is a big difference between dipping into it every once in a while and committing to live within its patterns.

While this sounds awfully churchy, it's actually not. Indeed, this liturgical structure was mediated into the prayer book tradition by a spiritual devotion for the laity that was widely

embraced by regular people who lived outside of churches and monasteries. The idea of the Daily Office was originally a regular communal practice. By the end of the fourth century, the Daily Office was transitioning into a monastic practice and began to be less of a feature in lay life. By the medieval period, it was expected that the laity would be at Matins (Morning Prayer) and Vespers (Evening Prayer)—as well as Mass—on holy days. Thus, regular folks would only attend Morning and Evening Prayer a few times a month. However, a new spiritual practice grew up that took the monastic pattern as a model but adapted it to the lives of lay people.

The rise of lay literacy in the high medieval period brought with it the Books of Hours. These were the central devotional books used by laypeople (men and women alike), and they contained a cycle of Offices that followed the basic structure of the monastic and priestly Office but with fewer psalms and greatly reduced seasonal variations. It offered regular folks a way to join in the Church's great cycles of prayer but in a manner that did not require retiring entirely from the world. They could read or say these abbreviated prayer hours and still lead their lives. On the eve of and during the English Reformation, the Latin Books of Hours and the English-language primers that replaced them held an important place in the devotional lives of upper- and middle-class lay Christians who prayed these Offices on a daily basis. The Daily Offices that appeared in our initial 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*—and in every subsequent book—are equally derived from these lay primers as well as the Sarum breviaries (the Daily Office books used by priests and monastics in England at the time).³ This Daily Office pattern in the prayer book is often described as taking the books of the clergy and allowing the laity to use them. However, it is just as fair—and perhaps more accurate—to say that these prayer book

Offices were the regular devotions of the laity with more room provided for the scripture and the psalms.

Why is this particular point important? Because it gives us the proper perspective: the Daily Office isn't a clergy thing that gets dumped on the laity, but a habit, a lay thing, that was maturing as scripture became more accessible to an English-reading public.

THE PRAYER BOOK SYSTEM AND THE ANGLICAN TRADITION

This pattern of prayer—the Daily Offices prayed twice a day and the Eucharist at least weekly if not more frequently—is the common heritage of the Christian Church. The Eastern Orthodox churches have it; the Roman Catholic Church has it; the Anglican churches have it. All of these churches understand that not everybody is going to be doing all of this praying all of the time—and that's okay. However, in the Eastern and Roman Catholic traditions, the Daily Offices (referred to as the Divine Praises and the Liturgy of the Hours respectively) as daily practices are virtually the province of clergy and monastics. Lay people, for the most part, are not aware of them or encouraged to do them except when they might appear publicly on Sundays or important feast days. Indeed, Roman Catholic spirituality since the time of the Reformation has emphasized daily Eucharist to the point that any other kind of daily service would be considered odd by the laity. The Anglican tradition is the only one that has consistently insisted by means of the prayer book that clergy and laity alike participate in this cycle of worship, formation, and transformation on a daily basis. I say by means of the prayer book advisedly: Our books insist on it, but that doesn't

mean that the people have always practiced it and that the clergy have always taught it.

However, many of the reform movements within Anglicanism have been anchored by a call back to the prayer book system of prayer and devotion. We see it with the Caroline Divines; we see it with the Oxford Movement; we see it with the Victorian English Revival. We even see it with the lifelong Anglicans John and Charles Wesley. The prayer book system is part of the method that earned the name of Methodism.

Can you be an Anglican without engaging, practicing, knowing, or caring about the prayer book system? Of course. Millions of Anglicans do it every day! But can you be an Anglican deeply engaged in the art and practice of Anglican spirituality without grappling with this system? As the prayer book represents a major strand of Anglican DNA, inattention to its rhythms and structure results in a severely restricted enjoyment of the Anglican experience. This is the homeland of Anglican spirituality. Even when Anglican churches and their flocks have not been diligent in this practice, living daily in the words of *The Book of Common Prayer*, there is value in realizing that it exists, seeing it as a devotional ideal, and understanding that our own efforts within the sweep of the larger picture of the Church's spiritual work, past and present.

Basic Principles for Liturgical Worship

Liturgical worship can be both daunting and confusing for those encountering it for the first time. And that is to be expected. It has its own internal rules and logics; once you get an idea of what these are, then it makes more sense. However, not all of these internal logics are obvious or self-evident; there are people who have been worshipping in this way their whole lives who may not be aware of them either.

Think again of running. It's something that most people have done to one degree or another all of their lives. Yet when someone chooses to take up running as a central part of an active lifestyle, they often need to re-learn some of the fundamental principles like posture, hydration, and structuring different kinds of runs for a better overall effect. Can you run without learning these things? Sure. You can strap on a pair of shoes and pound the pavement a few times a week without this knowledge. But you will achieve your goals more quickly and more safely—and with less pain—if you take the time to learn some basic principles.

ADORATION

Modern American secular society is a transactional society. As a result, children absorb the principles of commercial transactions at a young age: If you want something, you have to pay for it; if you pay for something, you'd better get it. As a result, it's no surprise that many of us start out with a vending-machine model of God. As a child, I remember getting a sense that if I prayed for something, I should get it—if I didn't get it, God either didn't like me or wasn't being

fair. I outgrew this perception, of course, as all do who have prayed for God to give them a pony. Nevertheless, I think many of us still have a vaguely transactional sense of worship. That if we are faithful and diligent in our attendance, God somehow owes us—as if we were building up credit to be used when we get stuck in a jam. Or, on the flip side, attendance at worship is a bargaining chip to be held over God's head. ("Do this thing for me, and I'll start going to church/I'll go to church a lot more/I'll never miss church.")

It doesn't work like that.

When we consider the principles of liturgical worship, it's helpful to take a quick look at the various ways in which we address God. Different traditions break down the aspects of worship and prayer in various ways, but one of the most common schemes (and the one referenced in the prayer book's catechism) identifies seven types: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition.⁴

I see adoration and praise as interrelated because of what is driving them—nothing but God. Praise is worship directed toward God for no other reason than rejoicing in the person and presence of God. It is not bribery to get something; it is flat-out joy in the Lord's presence. Adoration is one step closer still: It is relaxing in the direct presence of God.

Thanksgiving is driven primarily by past events. This is when we give thanks for what God has already done for us (and with us and through us) and for the wonder, majesty, and delight of God's creation.

Oblation is prayer driven by our response to God and God's works: At the heart of oblation is offering. Specifically, we offer ourselves—as well as our works—to God to be united with his will and works. I see this as related to thanksgiving but the next logical step beyond it.

Penitence, intercession, and petition are different from the others because they are all asking for something. In penitence,

we acknowledge (and bewail) our sins and ask God for forgiveness. In intercession, we ask God for things on behalf of others, recalling individuals, groups, and ultimately all creation to God's memory—and our own. In petition, we make requests to God based on our own needs.

The liturgical worship of *The Book of Common Prayer* contains all seven of these elements in different balances at different points. All forms of Christian worship have these seven aspects to various degrees. One of the strengths of liturgical worship is that the balance between these elements is stable.

Within the Eucharist and the Daily Office, the first three—adoration, praise, and thanksgiving—predominate. That's not to say that the others don't have a place and don't appear, but these liturgies emphasize the praise of God and rejoicing in God's presence. The fundamental and primary purpose of liturgical worship is praise and adoration. It's about celebrating the relationship; it's about experiencing the vastness of who and what God is. It's not flattery with an eye to scoring something off the Big Guy at a time to be named later. God does not need our praise; God is not subject to our manipulation.

FORMATION

Having said that the primary point of worship is the praise and adoration of God, I'm going to turn that around on us. The praise and adoration of God is and must be our primary purpose in worship—but God doesn't need it. God is not made greater for our praise; God is God perfectly well without us. We are the ones who need to be reminded—we're the ones who have to have the Gospel held before our eyes lest we forget and forsake it. So, despite God being the

fundamental aim of our worship, if we are to speak of benefit at all, we do it for our benefit.

As a result, the way we worship has to accomplish its aim but also must be formational to those of us who participate in it. It needs to draw our minds and hearts to God. It needs to facilitate a lively encounter with the Holy One whom we praise. It needs to give us the tools for understanding what it means to be in the midst of holy things, holy people, and the holy presences within holy places. It needs to feed our sense of the sacred so that, once we have returned to more ostensibly secular living, we may spy out the presence of the holy woven in the warp and weft of the world around us and within us. In worship we are given the signatures, the characteristics, the tastes of God in a deliberate sense so that we are more able to recognize them when and where we least expect them.

There is a danger in realizing that worship is for us: That is when formation usurps the purpose and becomes the primary focus. When the nave is turned into a lecture hall or when worship becomes an exercise in consciousness-raising, we have lost sight of God. Edification, formation, is an important secondary purpose of worship but, whenever it moves into primacy, we move into an idolatrous self-worship where we take the center rather than the Living God.

No less idolatrous, of course, is when worship becomes its own end, and its aesthetic qualities and technical performance edge out adoration. Worship too consumed by its own elegance is a worship of ourselves and the works of our own hands. I say this not because I don't like beautiful and elegant worship—indeed, I say it precisely because I do. Beauty and holiness are essential aspects of worship done well; care, precision, and planning are essential for worship to be what it can be. And yet whenever our focus is turned from God, we have substantially missed the mark because the purpose of the worship has gone awry.

The true formation found in worship consists of orienting the soul toward God and aligning us within God's vision of reality. In worship, we are turned to God in praise and adoration and are given to see the rest of creation as fellow worshipers hymning God with their very being. This is the edification that we need. Whenever worship moves toward ostensible edification, it loses its primary focus—God—and, in doing so, loses its power to orient us beyond ourselves in him. Thus, edification is an important secondary aspect of worship, but if it ever threatens to take primary place, then its very value is undermined.

REPETITION

Liturgical worship is founded on the principle of repetition. There are patterns and habits that make us who and what we are. The shape of worship shapes our character; the texts of worship pattern our priorities; the ways of relating to one another performed in the liturgy rehearse principles for engagement outside of worship as well. Worship is—literally—habit-forming. And it's supposed to be. We don't repeat certain words or prayers or texts because we are unable to think of anything else or have no other substitutes; we repeat them because we believe they are important and worth repeating over and over again.

Modern brain science tells us that an action has to be repeated daily for roughly forty days for it to become a habit. My martial arts teachers tell me that the Chinese reckon daily practice for one hundred days as the small accomplishment, 1,000 days as the middle accomplishment, and 10,000 days as the great accomplishment—and that no one should presume to teach without the middle accomplishment at least (roughly

three years of daily practice) on the grounds that they have not yet achieved sufficient understanding.

Repetition happens in a few different ways in the prayer book system. The first is the repetition of services. Morning and Evening Prayer truly are the bedrock of the system; their daily, weekly, and yearly repetition shapes us like nothing else. The Eucharist and the sacraments of the Church become the punctuation of this ongoing rhythm.

The second is the repetition of texts and actions. The same texts and the same body of texts are rehearsed over and over. Some—like the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed—are repeated multiple times a day. Some—like certain psalms and canticles—are repeated several times a week. Some—like our Eucharistic Prayers—are repeated at least once a week. The Psalter is run through monthly or in a seven-week cycle; scripture itself—or at least a fulsome quantity—is covered every year or two. As we gather in corporate worship, our rituals of greeting, responding, and reconciling with one another are patterns of relating designed to help us see Christ and find the holy in the other.

Repetition teaches in a variety of ways; it is not just a matter of gaining information or training a skill. One of the most fruitful teachings of repetition comes through exhaustion: In martial arts training, constant repetition of an act or form wears out the muscles—no matter how strong they may be—and forces the body to learn efficiency. Our body learns something in a special way when the muscles are burdened, deadened, and ultimately desensitized by repetition; at a certain point the neuromuscular motion breaks down, and the repetition becomes an act of will—the will guiding and sustaining it as the body finds on its own a minimal efficiency that enables the motion to continue. It is then that the deepest levels of learning occur. At this point, it's no longer

a matter of being fun or enjoyable or even good exercise—it's passed purely into the realm of discipline.

What are our expectations of our spiritual practices? Do we expect them to be fun or enjoyable or a good spiritual stretch? What happens if we come to them and find them no longer fun? We speak of a discipline of prayer because the repetition of the liturgical round requires discipline. It requires commitment to the concept of repetition even when we don't feel like we're getting anything out of it.

VARIATION

But repetition on its own can get a bit boring. Even worse than being boring, repetition without allied aspects and disciplines can become rote and stagnant, allowing the mind and focus to wander and reducing the formative texts and actions to mechanical and thoughtless motions and mumblings. As a result, the liturgical round has principles of variation built into it. Variation—a break from the routine, a deliberate alteration in the pattern—not only keeps our attention and keeps us mindful but can also break open new vistas into prayers and practices that we thought we already knew.

The seasons of the liturgical year are one of our chief vehicles of variation. As the seasons highlight different aspects of the Christian Gospel, liturgical texts are required or omitted; the *Gloria* disappears in Lent, the *Pascha Nostrum* appears in Easter. These changes may be slight, but they subtly alter our experience of worship. Sometimes we don't notice any effect on us. At other times, they may catalyze a new understanding of God, life, and everything. At the least, the changes through the seasons—whether those be textual or

the ornamentation of the worship space or the kinds of music chosen (when there is music)—communicate something of the unique character of the time.

One of the most constant sources of variation is found in the scripture texts deployed in worship. The psalms and lessons prescribed by the lectionary are just as much a part of the liturgy as the prayers. The lectionaries present scriptural pieces—stories or prophecies or teachings—that combine to communicate the deep meaning of the season in which they are placed. The changing psalms give us something new in the otherwise stable structure of Morning and Evening Prayer. Variation is the spice for repetition that helps us keep our minds and hearts engaged.

Again, we can see the parallels to running. If you train like it is in-season all of the time, you're going to injure yourself. Instead, you push hard in some seasons; you cut back in others. You add in speed workouts on the track or hill-repeats in the weeks before an important race; you do fewer in the off-season when you're just maintaining your general level of fitness. More rest days and long runs give the body what it needs without undue stress on the various parts.

Some people need more variation than others. I also think some times, places, and cultures tend to need more or less variation than others. Modern westerners on the whole prefer a higher level of variation in liturgies than we see in other times and places. The prayer book is helpful here in both respects: It offers ways that variation can be introduced but also controls just how much can be altered so that the benefits of balanced repetition are not completely lost.

CONTINUITY

One of the most beautiful images from the Book of Revelation is the image of the cosmic chorus encircling the celestial throne of God and the Lamb in chapters 4 and 5. Revelation gives us a sense of the whole world oriented in a continuous outpouring of praise in the presence of God. Holding this image in mind, we gain the sense that our worship only appears to begin and end. We temporarily join our voices to the unending chorus of praise. We slip in and out of that eternal song. Whenever we pray and worship, whether we are in a crowd of thousands, together with only a few, or if we are in our room alone, our prayer and worship is never strictly an individual thing. Because of this greater praise, our personal prayer and praise is always corporate because our worship contributes to the whole.

Liturgical worship helps us remember this because we are not just joined in the principle of prayer—we are also united with the whole in its practice. The liturgy gives us a tangible sense of continuity with the rest of the Christian family across both space and time. When we use the words of *The Book of Common Prayer*, we are sharing common words with all those in our church. Not only that, but we are also praying in union with Anglicans across the world. Our prayer joins us across space and connects us with the Communion of Saints through time as well. We share practices with all those who have used books of common prayer across the past five hundred years. We share with all those who came before, and we bear witness to the prayer and praise of the Church stretching to the time of the apostles. Indeed—language aside—the Eucharist from the seventh-century Leonine sacramentary (one of the oldest surviving liturgical books) would seem pretty familiar to anyone used to the Eucharist from our American prayer book dating from 1979.

STABILITY

This great continuity across time leads us to the last principle—stability. Despite the passage of ages and the many cultures it has moved through, the liturgy has provided a coherent and continuous pattern of understanding, communicating, and living the Gospel. Indeed, *The Book of Common Prayer* as a whole has been prayed over generations and centuries.

The prayer book is an authentic expression of the historic Western liturgy that has nourished millions who have come before us. It is an authentic expression of the English devotional experience. The importance of this is not that it's English, of course, but that it is a rooted, embodied, and inherited tradition that has been embraced and passed on by a diverse group over centuries—not just dreamed up by a few people last week. Furthermore, the prayer book is an authentic expression of historic Anglican liturgy that balances reform of Western norms with scripture and the theological and spiritual practices of the Early Church.

Because of this long period of use, because of its proven ability to form Christians, the prayer book system commends itself to our use. Repetition and formation work best when we commit ourselves to a given pattern of practice. The prayer book offers us a stable set of practices capable of sustaining the spirit across decades, through highs and lows, enthusiasms and doldrums.

Basic Disciplines for Liturgical Worship

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINES

On my more optimistic days, I have faith in the formative power of the liturgy. Much of the work of the liturgy on the soul occurs passively. That is, it's a matter of trusting the process. We may not feel it working on us, but following the prayer book system, being in the liturgies, participating in the prayers, will have a long-term effect whether we realize it or not. General wisdom is that eighty percent of success is simply showing up—and that certainly seems to apply here.

However, at the end of the day, just being there isn't enough. There are people who live in these liturgical cycles yet who seem not to be transformed and changed by them, who can exhibit the baser tendencies of human nature unaltered by their liturgical practice.

Showing up is important—but it isn't enough.

In a central scene from *The Godfather: Part III*, the aging mafia boss Michael Corleone meets with the fictional Cardinal Lamberto. In speaking about the nature of things, the cardinal takes a stone out of a fountain. Although the rock has been sitting in water for years, the cardinal breaks it open to reveal that it is completely dry inside. He then says to the crime boss, "The same thing has happened with men in Europe. For centuries, they have been surrounded by Christianity. But Christ has not penetrated it. Christ does not live within them."⁵

Showing up is important—but it isn't enough.

I don't want to be a rock. I want to be a sponge. I want to be permeated and saturated by my environment. I want my

insides to be touched as much as my outsides. I don't want to simply experience the cycles of the liturgy; I want to be altered and transformed by them.

If eighty percent of success in the liturgy is just showing up, than the other twenty percent may well be about making it count, about opening up the insides. This is where we get to the disciplines that can enhance and amplify our liturgical practice. These are the long-term habits that help us open our minds and our hearts to what is going on around us, that crack open our shells and enable the waters of life to seep within us and change us. As we discussed earlier, it may be helpful to think about these habits from an active perspective: These are the things that we do to cooperate with God's transforming grace. Alternatively, you may resonate with a more passive construction: These are the things that help us stop resisting God's embrace and help us relax into the person of God.

I will focus here on six disciplines that can help us delve deeply into our liturgical worship: participation, attentiveness, memorization, diligence, stability, and intentionality.

PARTICIPATION

When we come before the Lord to worship, when we prepare ourselves to once again take the plunge into the unending choruses of praise to God and to the Lamb, it means fully committing. If we're there to praise, then let every part of us join in the praise. Check the psalms. Does it really say, "Let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the woods fold their branches over their trunks and just stand there stoically while everyone else is singing as if they're too cool to join in (perhaps in a slightly ironic way)."⁶

I didn't think so. And yet, I see this almost every week at worship.

During colonial times, two people appeared at the front of the church to make worship happen: the priest and the clerk or reader. If you go into some of our oldest Episcopal churches that still have their original furniture, you might see a two-level pulpit: The priest stood in the upper part while the clerk stood in the lower. The priest was, well, the priest, and he would say the priest parts. The clerk was a layman, and his job was to lead the speaking parts for the people.

On one hand, this setup has benefits—with the clerk leading, participants knew when to say what they needed to say.

And, in a time where the congregation had varying degrees of literacy, it was always helpful to have at least one person who could read. On the other hand, it also became entirely too easy to sit back and let the clerk do his thing instead of seeing him as the leader for our thing. The Victorian liturgical scholar Walter Frere speaks unfavorably of this duet between the priest and the clerk or, later, the priest and the choir. In both cases, the congregation sat in as the audience while someone else performed their parts. In his book, *Principles of Religious Ceremonial*, Frere describes this—quite rightly—as a low-point for liturgy.

We have inherited *The Book of Common Prayer* so that we can pray together in common. The fact that the Anglican tradition has always provided access for the whole people to the whole service speaks volumes about what we understand participation to be. When the prayer book says “People,” it doesn't intend a token representative but the whole body.

Thankfully, the clerk phenomenon has not been a big part of Episcopal worship in recent years, but the point still stands: The prayer book tradition is a participatory tradition. The intention has always been that the congregation should be

engaged intellectually, spiritually, and verbally in what is going on.

Participation does, at the minimum, three things. First, it is much easier to engage and remain engaged in the act of worship when we are verbally involved. The acts of listening, responding, rolling the words around in our mouths connect us to what is going on around us. Second, our verbal participation represents an assent to the content of the words. When we join in, we are affirming what is being said—we believe it, or at least have an understanding that this is what the Church teaches and that we are committed to it, even as we may wrestle with some phrases. In fact, that is what “amen” means—it's a Hebrew word meaning so be it or yes, indeed! Third, participation both signals and creates a rapport with the people around us. We don't come to public worship in the church by ourselves and for our own sake. Public worship is corporate worship in the most literal of senses. We form a body, the Body of Christ into whom we were baptized. As we come together, we are separate members of the Body of Christ joining back together, re-forming the Body in a simultaneously spiritual and literal sense. When people stand silent in such a gathering, their actions call into question their relationship to the rest of the Body.

Participation in singing is a slightly different story, but the same principles should be kept in mind. Not everyone sings—or sings well—I understand that. There are different patterns of participation of singing in worship. Some folks are better singers than others. Some are shy. Some don't read music or don't read it well enough to feel comfortable joining in from the beginning of a song—particularly if it's a new one. Some guys might think it unmanly (and they would be totally wrong on that count). Some people were raised in churches where singing isn't common or is frowned upon—whether officially or by long-standing custom.

After pointing out the myriad instructions to sing parts of the service from the psalms to the prayers to the creeds to the hymns, Victorian scholar John Henry Blunt in the *Annotated Book of Common Prayer* confidently concluded, “The devotional system of the Prayer Book is, therefore, a singing system; and the Church of England is what the Mediaeval, the Primitive, and the Jewish Churches were, ‘a Singing Church.’” As framed notices in choir rooms across the world will attest, the great early African theologian Saint Augustine of Hippo really did say that, “To sing is to pray twice” (once with the words, and again with the beauty of the voice raised in song).

The goal should be for the whole congregation to join in song at the congregational singing parts—service music and hymns alike. That means as congregants, we have a responsibility to raise our voices and join them with those around us—even if we do so softly. But we aren’t the only ones who have a say in this situation; the musicians and worship planners can have an impact here as well. Some music—particularly some of the pop styles of recent years—works better for individual performers than large groups. A wide vocal range from high to low notes, complex rhythms, and jumps in pitch are hard for the average congregation to sing and to sing well together. The choice of the music can sabotage the intention to participate even if it is entirely inadvertent on the part of the musicians.

Participation in the service, whether in the sung or the spoken parts, is an important part of aligning yourself with the intention and the purpose of the liturgy. That is not to say that there aren’t other modes of participation—not all participation is active participation—but vocal participation in conscious consonance with the body around you is a hallmark of Anglican liturgy at its best.

In some churches, parts of the service music may be sung by the choir in English, Latin, or another language. Is it

possible to fully participate if this is happening? After all, the language may not be one you understand, and your neighbors might frown on you trying to join in with the choir. All is not lost here. As we will discuss a bit later when we tackle the Eucharist, the *Gloria in Excelsis* (Glory to God in the Highest) and the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy, Holy) are themselves songs that scripture places in the mouths of the angels. They both represent and embody that ceaseless chorus of praise that we are privileged to join at least temporarily.

We can participate fully even when someone else is doing the singing if we do two important things: First, we participate by engaging the meaning of what is being sung. We can still roll the words around in our minds if it is a part of the service music that we know. In most churches, if the music is in a language other than the mother tongue of the congregation, a translation usually is (and certainly should be) provided.

Second, we need to revel in the beauty. We sometimes forget that beauty is an apt attribute of God and that our worship communicates God and proclaims the Gospel with a greater authenticity when beauty is placed in its service. A good choir can metaphorically transport us, conjuring sonically the whole celestial realm and its heavenly chorus with whom we join in praising God.

ATTENTIVENESS

If intentionality is about keeping ourselves focused on the big picture, then attentiveness is the related-but-different discipline of keeping our eye on the little picture. It is the discipline of remaining in the present and being attentive to what we’re doing, the words we’re hearing, the words we’re saying, the rite that we’re experiencing. Attentiveness is remaining in the moment.

Most of us like to think we're pretty good at this already.

Alas, it only takes a brief experiment to show us how wrong we are. Go ahead. Make the exercise of remaining in the present as simple as you can. Cut out all distractions and attempt to sit in silence for five minutes; remain attentive and present by counting your breaths up to ten and starting over again. If you are like me, it won't take too long before your mind is flitting all over the place. You realize that you stopped counting a while back, or you discover that you finished planning your grocery list while you counted to twenty-five. This phenomenon is aptly described by Zen teachers as monkey mind. You discover that however disciplined you *thought* your thoughts were, they dash around like a hyper little primate at the drop of a hat.

Here's the thing: Our struggle with being present in the moment doesn't just arise when we are trying to sit in silence and count breaths. It is a challenge all of the time. The counting of breaths just helps us to notice the problem more clearly. Hence the need for attentiveness. And, as much as I'd like to blame it on mobile devices, the Internet, or TV, spiritual writers have been wrestling with the issue of attentiveness since at least the fourth century and likely earlier. So, how do we cage the little monkey for as long as we need so that we can pray, sing, and join in the worship of God?

This requires a multi-pronged approach. The first and most basic step is to recognize that the situation exists in the first place. When you are in a service and you realize that your mind has wandered, gently but firmly direct it back. Don't beat yourself up about it. Your mind will only use that as an excuse to go wandering off again about what a failure you are. As frequently as you find yourself wandering, just direct yourself back.

One of the few bodily gestures inserted into English canon law also provides an opportunity for attentiveness. In 1603, canon 18 enjoined that everyone present should make "due and lowly reverence" at the name of Jesus—that is, bow the head. At the parish where I learned this custom, it was explained as an honoring of the Incarnation. As a result, the head was bowed whenever the names Jesus, Mary, or the saint of the day were said, each reminding us of God's incarnational presence in the world. I find that this sort of brief physical response helps me to pay better attention—to listen harder and to focus more clearly on the task at hand.

When praying alone from a book or saying the Daily Office by yourself, another tactic for retaining attentiveness is to engage as many senses as possible. Reading silently gives your mind ample opportunities for wandering. The act of reading aloud greatly improves the experience: You get the lips moving, and you hear the sound of your own words in addition to the passing of the mind over the letters. Adding in further physical gestures—like bowing or crossing yourself or kneeling—may help.

A fifteenth-century devotional for English nuns recommends that attentiveness is much improved when you remember yourself to be in the presence of Jesus and imagine him close by you.⁷ If you hold in mind that you are speaking your words of praise directly to him, the feeling of being in conversation can help keep you more attentive.

The same devotional also makes a broad statement, noting that inattention in saying the Office is related to inattentive habits outside of the Office as well. I think I would rather say it the other way—habits of discipline outside of worship help us be more disciplined within it. As far as habits of discipline go, there is none better than a daily bout of breath meditation.

Simply sitting in silence for ten to twenty minutes, counting your breaths to ten, then starting over again, is a very useful tool for learning your mind more deeply, getting a handle on your inner life, and gradually soothing the hyper little monkey that seems to live there.

I have heard some people express concerns over such a practice because it is Buddhist rather than being properly Christian. To my mind, that is as silly as a wrestler saying that he couldn't do push-ups because they're a football exercise. Just as push-ups are a universal fitness exercise, breath meditation in various forms, under various names, and taught in various ways is a universal tool for spiritual fitness. While it may be best known in modern America as a Zen practice, breath meditation has been part of Christian spiritual practice at least since the time of the fourth-century Desert Fathers and Mothers, if not before. Breath meditation is also an excellent foundational discipline if you choose to explore the tradition of contemplative prayer.

At the end of the day, attentiveness touches deep chords around the practices of an intentional, incarnational life. The principle of incarnation takes seriously the reality of God, the ongoing presence of Christ, the movement of the Holy Spirit within our normal, daily, earthly life—described by Julian of Norwich as the “full homely divinity” rightly celebrated in our Anglican tradition. If we are not able to be fully present in the present of each moment, then these daily incarnations, these moments of God's self-revelation, will slip past us, unnoticed as our minds flit from past to present to imaginary worlds of our own making.

MEMORIZATION

While I am tempted to file this discipline as a subset of attentiveness, it's important enough to earn its own section. We are more attentive in corporate worship when we can follow along, and, while we are a people of the book, that doesn't always mean we have to be stuck in the book! One of the glories of worship conducted in the tradition of the prayer book is that so much of it repeats, both daily and weekly. As a result, over time, it will become ingrained in your memory.

When my elder daughter was quite small—maybe four or so—I was concerned about her lack of attention during church; she would frequently color when I wanted her to pay attention (but since she was being quiet, I didn't make a fuss). Then, one day, I noticed a strange sight: of her own volition, she went into our parlor, lined up her stuffed animals in front of a small organ bench topped with a cross she'd swiped from somewhere, and began doing church complete with most of Eucharistic Prayer A! I learned two very important things from this: Attentiveness may come in a variety of forms (especially in the young), and memorization occurs naturally with the prayer book rite.

It is easier to be attentive to words that are already a part of us. When we pray alone, it is easier to stay focused on prayers we already know. It's easier to stay focused on the words the priest is praying if we are praying them silently along with her. Memorization can happen by osmosis—indeed, it's easiest if it happens that way—but the passive acquisition of the liturgy is only enhanced when we set out to actively acquire it as well.

As in acting, make sure you know your own lines first. Memorize the congregational parts of the Eucharist. Make sure you know the fundamentals: the basic responses, the Kyrie, the Gloria, the Creed, the Confession, the Post-

Communion prayers. Then, the central canticles of the Office: the Song of Zechariah, the Song of Mary, the Song of Simeon. Other pieces will suggest themselves to you from there.

We will talk about this later, but the collects of the prayer book represent a great distillation of our tradition. And when I say tradition, I mean that our prayer book includes collects from the time of the Church Fathers—that is, the writers and thinkers from the first four centuries of the Church's existence—to the present, with many of the Sunday collects having their origins in the sixth or seventh centuries. Taking time each week to commit the collect to memory will place you in living conversation with these spiritual and theological gems.

I have found that the more I memorize (or the more that memorization happens to me), the more I understand the interrelation of our liturgical language. For instance, I remember the first time I realized that the words "...walking in holiness and righteousness..." in the General Thanksgiving at Morning and Evening Prayer come from the Song of Zechariah ("...holy and righteous in his sight..."). Then, a while later, reading an alternate history book set in post-Civil War America by a favorite (Jewish) sci-fi author, I was astounded to see a character make proclamation that was full of prayer book language.⁸ The Author's Note confirmed that most of the speeches in the book had been adapted from actual addresses of the period, and, without having to look it up, I recognized from the rhythms and the rhetoric a nineteenth-century prayer book Episcopalian connecting with his audience through words familiar to them all. Sure enough, upon Googling it, I found that the proclamation was an adaptation of one by Jefferson Davis, Confederate president—and Episcopalian.⁹

Indeed, this is how the real fruits of memorization occur. Little bits of the liturgies will float up unannounced. Maybe

it is sparked by a couple of words put in combination by a colleague or a snatch of song—they strike a chord with something buried in your memory. Often, my most fruitful theological thoughts and connections occur in this way as my subconscious mulls over something I've memorized without being quite aware of it. Moments like these move us closer to the habitual recollection of God, that end to which liturgical spirituality directs.

DILIGENCE

This one is pretty obvious but it still needs to be said. We are talking about habits, formation, the process of constructing an abiding Christian character through the discipline of regular worship that leads toward the habitual recollection of God. This can't happen without diligence. Acts don't become habits if they're not practiced on a regular, repeating basis. American historian and philosopher Will Durant offered this summary of Aristotle's ethics: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."¹⁰ The same is true of spirituality. It is not an act (or, alternatively, if we don't want it to be an act); it must be a habit.

A devotion like the Daily Office does its work in a period measured by decades, not moments or occasions. We can't pray it occasionally and expect it to bear fruit. Likewise, treating corporate worship as a once a month, drop-in-if-the-mood-strikes affair fails to train us in the paths of holiness that weekly attendance does.

This is not to try to set up a New Legalism. There was a letter that started floating around Europe and the Middle East at some point in the sixth century, originally composed in Latin and eventually translated into virtually every medieval local language. It was allegedly written by Christ himself in

heaven and dropped through the clouds into Jerusalem, and it is filled with dire warnings against anyone who didn't go to church on Sundays and who did any sort of secular work.¹¹ In countries where people did work, it threatened plagues, famines, and widespread disasters. I am happy to say that several councils and church leaders denounced this crude attempt at social control, including Saint Boniface, the eighth-century, English-born Apostle to the Germans who had stern words for those who circulated it. Yet the mentality of the letter appeared in law codes across Europe and persists in modern day. We don't go to church on Sunday lest God blast us; rather it is both our duty and delight to worship together the God who formed us, who loves us, and who was willing to become incarnate and suffer bodily for our redemption and reconciliation.

At its most basic, the discipline of diligence is about priorities. To what degree are we willing to spend our most precious coin, that which we can neither earn nor hoard: our time? The way we choose our activities reveals our priorities above all else. Any relationship worth having must be nurtured with this precious commodity, and our relationship with God is no different.

As the father of two active children, I know how difficult it can be to carve out time. In our time-strapped age, schedulers of sporting events and dance rehearsals think nothing of seizing the Sunday morning time slot. While creative use of the available options (like Saturday or Sunday evening services) can help negotiate this treacherous turf, sometimes decisions have to be made. And on those mornings with no good alternatives when ballet wins (I'm looking at you, mandatory *Nutcracker* dress rehearsal), do we have the persistence to substitute a family act of worship in lieu of the full-on corporate experience?

To tell the truth, I am sometimes envious of my priestly wife and clergy friends for whom praying the Daily Office is (or could be or should be) part of their paid work. As a layman, I can only imagine my boss's response to a request for paid prayer time. Instead the Offices have to be fit into carefully carved out niches of time that occur between child care and house work and relationship maintenance and regular employment. I will freely admit that sometimes those carefully carved niches collapse; sometimes the time I think I have disappears. There are days when the set prayer just doesn't happen. On those days, I try to at least glance over the psalms for the day, and if that doesn't happen, at least hit the memorized highpoints of the Office, and if that doesn't happen, at least a quick prayer of apology. In the grand scheme of things, at least feeling guilty about missing the Office is itself an act of diligence.

While holding up the importance of diligence, we also have to approach the spiritual life as a marathon, not a sprint. This is a lifelong path we tread. There will be seasons of our lives where time is easier to find or harder to find. There will be periods when blocks of time come more freely and periods when it will not. This, too, is part of the ebb and flow of incarnate life. Our goal is to be as diligent as possible given the conditions in which we find ourselves.

STABILITY

While we talked about stability under the basic principles of liturgical worship, it has to be discussed as a discipline as well. In this sense, stability means rooting yourself within a set of liturgies. It means defining the center of your spiritual practice.

When I was considering graduate school, I sat with a mentor and agonized over a variety of choices, largely around which theological discipline should be my focus. After letting me go on for a while, my mentor stopped me. "It's actually very simple," he said. "What do you want to be formed as?" It was, of course, the perfect question for me at that moment. Before embarking into the process of intellectual formation, I had to consider what I wanted my fundamental tool set and perspective to be at the end of the process. Historians and theologians and textual scholars may all look at similar material; what makes them who they are and what establishes their disciplines is what questions, perspectives, and skill sets they bring to that material.

The same is true here too.

What do you want to be formed as? What will be your tool set and perspective for engaging life in God?

The prayer book offers one perspective. But it is hardly the only one. Christianity offers a wide array of spiritual tool sets, some complementary to one another, others more exclusive. There are a variety of Roman Catholic schools of practice as well as Orthodox ones; the Protestant array is even larger. Once we head outside of Christianity, there is an even broader set of possibilities. In the face of the vast multitude of options, one possibility is eclecticism, a sort of cafeteria spirituality where we take a bit from here, a bit from there, and not too much of any one thing. In the modern, consumer-driven marketplace of twenty-first century America, this option seems popular and is the hallmark of the spiritual but not religious set.

But what do you want to be formed as?

The trouble with eclecticism is that its specialty is forming spiritual dilettantes. Saint Benedict starts off his famous rule for monks with a description of different kinds of monks that turns out to be a parable of sorts. One kind of monk

is the sarabite. Benedict says: "With no experience to guide them, no rule to try them as gold is tried in a furnace, [they] have a character as soft as lead. Still loyal to the world by their actions, they clearly lie to God with their tonsure. Two or three together, or even alone, without a shepherd, they pen themselves up in their own sheepfolds, not the Lord's. Their law is what they like to do, whatever strikes their fancy. Anything they believe in and choose, they call holy; anything they dislike, they consider forbidden."¹²

I hear this passage, and then I think about my own spiritual journey—the way that I wander and flit, trying out a devotion here or a practice there, and sometimes being earnest about something for a few weeks until the novelty wears off. "Their law is what they like to do, whatever strikes their fancy. Anything they believe in and choose, they call holy." It seems Benedict has put his finger on the spiritual seeker trend. Benedict is giving us a warning, born out of decades if not centuries of monastic practicality. It is fine to search, but if we expect to find transformation of self and transformation of character, we need to find something and stick with it; we need to find something and, instead of shaping it to conform with what we think we want, allow it to shape us toward what we need.

Benedict's rule cannot do this for us—we're not monks. As Episcopalians, however, the prayer book is the next best thing.

When I sit at my desk, I can look up and see two bookshelves crammed with various liturgical works and prayer books from a host of traditions past and present. As much as I love these resources, looking through them, and being inspired by things I find in them, I have a home base in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

What do you want to be formed as?

I want to be formed as an Anglican. More than that, I want to be formed as an Episcopalian. And that means dedicating

myself to the patterns and poetics of practice embedded within the prayer book. I can use other sources too, but the prayer book is the center around which everything else is arranged. I rely on a variety of liturgical materials from different sources to supplement and embellish the texts of the prayer book, but my primary toolset and perspective for engaging life in God remains the prayer book. That's the kind of stability that enables transformation of life.

INTENTIONALITY

The final discipline is intentionality. Think of this as focusing our attention on the big picture. It's not enough to simply show up; we also need to hold in our minds the reason why we're showing up. God is not made greater through our worship of him; God is already greater than that. While we worship God for our own purposes, we would do well to remind ourselves of what those are and to carry them into worship with us. But we don't simply come to worship to fulfill an obligation or to gain another bargaining chip with God. Rather, we come because God is worthy of praise, and in the very act of praise and adoration, we recall to ourselves and those around us who God is and what God has done for us.

Before we participate in any act of worship—whether alongside hundreds of others or by ourselves—we would do well to stop and fix in our minds what we are about to participate in. We are here to worship God. We are here to enjoy the presence of God and to participate in the process of communicating with God alongside and in communion with a great company who have praised him through the ages. Beyond that fundamental principle shared by all forms of liturgical worship, the various liturgies have their own

purposes. Be aware of what it is you are about to do. Focus on the general intention of the service in which you will participate.

Furthermore, worship is part of a pattern of orienting ourselves toward God and aligning our stories, beliefs, and principles with God's. As we consider the general intentions of the service, we also want to connect these general intentions with what is going on with us. The liturgies tend to speak in generalities—we thank God for blessings, we lift up concerns. As part of being intentional, as we take a moment to consider the big picture, we should also take a moment to consider the specific intersections between the language of the liturgy and the events of our lives. What are those specific things we are thankful for? What are the actual concerns burdening our hearts and minds?

I'll talk more about the general intentions of the various services later in the book. But briefly, specific intention is the practice of holding in mind a particular aspect of the service that touches on something going on in our lives at that moment. For instance, if someone has just died, we might choose to participate in a Eucharist holding them in mind, recognizing that—as the Eucharist connects us with the whole communion of saints—we are thankful for their place in our lives. We are comforted, knowing that our connection with them through the Eucharist has not ended but that we share the same banquet table with them. Or, if we have been touched by a particular joy as we approach the Daily Office, we might hold that joy before us as a concrete example of those things for which we praise and thank God.

Next Steps

Just as a runner needs to have the right kind of shoes, a good training plan, a set of achievable goals to shoot for, and sense of how all of these things relate to one another, these are the basic tools and techniques for an informed and engaged approach to the spiritual life from the Anglican perspective. Sure, there is more to it than just these things we explored—some we will discuss later in the book, and some we won't. Nevertheless, these are fundamentals that will help you understand and get the most out of the spiritual depths in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Now that we have covered the fundamentals of the prayer book's implied rule of life, we have identified three particular components that fit together: the Calendar of the Church Year, the Daily Office, and the Holy Eucharist. In the following chapters, we will take a look at these three elements. Each of these topics will get three chapters. In the first chapter of each section, I'll give a basic orientation to help you understand the prayer book's perspective on the element. In the second chapter of the section, I'll look at the text of *The Book of Common Prayer* itself and point out where that element appears. In the third chapter, I will focus on an aspect of that element that has a particular pertinence for the Anglican tradition. There is no way that we can cover everything about these topics—indeed, we will barely scratch the surface! However, this way of approaching the topics provides a solid sense of how the prayer book tradition understands the core elements of liturgical spirituality.

NOTES

- 1 The letters and essays of the Roman Stoic author Seneca, the Cynic epistles attributed to Diogenes and Crates, and the *Discourses of Musonius Rufus* all pick up on this theme.
- 2 Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality*. (London: SPCK, 1986), pp. 21-23.
- 3 You'll see this term, *Sarum*, pop up at various points. Sarum is the Latin name for the English Diocese of Salisbury. In the late medieval period, Salisbury was a major center of book production; as a result, the liturgical books produced for the cathedral and the churches of the diocese spread far beyond the regional borders. Because of its wide diffusion, most English worship before the Reformation was according to the Sarum Rite. The texts of these liturgies are broadly continuous with the common Latin liturgies of the West, but there were some peculiarities in the lectionaries and the ceremonial also found in North France and Brittany. Thus, Sarum refers to this English, pre-Reformation, Latin-language heritage.
- 4 The discussion of these seven principle kinds of prayer in the catechism is on pages 856-857 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- 5 *The Godfather: Part III*.
- 6 Psalm 96:11b-12 (*The Book of Common Prayer*, 726). Paraphrased.
- 7 This devotional is called *The Myroure of Our Ladye* and is a fascinating work written to explain to the sisters of a Brigittine monastery the meaning of their Latin services in Middle English. It gives us a unique insight into the lives of late medieval nuns and how they approached their lives of prayer.
8. Harry Turtledove, *How Few Remain: A Novel of the Second War Between the States*, (N.Y., N.Y.: Ballentine, 1997), p. 468.
- 9 The proclamation adapted was Jefferson Davis' proclamation of a fast day on February 26, 1862.
- 10 Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the World's Greatest Philosophers* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1926), p. 87.
- 11 This text is referred to as "The Sunday Letter" or "The Letter from Heaven." The English versions of it and background information are found in Dorothy Haines, ed. and trans., *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter in Anglo-Saxon England* (Anglo-Saxon Texts 8: Brewer, 2010).
- 12 RB 1:6-9. All citations from the Rule are from Timothy Fry, ed., *RB 1980* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1980).