

A Litany is a list of asks. Penitence is regretting and wishing to atone for sins.

- Wishing to make amends (correct an error)
- Expiate (pay the penalty) for a wrong
- Reconcile with God and man.

No doubt, this is a somber undertaking, and we get hit, smack dab between the eyes with this at the start of Lent. And I have been inspired to make this the focus of study the next five + weeks! Please take a step back from the emotional weight of this. Let me tell you a story. Maybe this will help us start off on the right foot by being curious about the heart of God in this.

When my oldest son, Theo, was two and I was pregnant with Noah, we moved temporarily into an apartment in downtown Philadelphia so Doug could start a new job and we could house-hunt. Everyday Theo and I would head out for walks to parks, the zoo, shopping for food, or head to the suburbs to meet with realtors. Theo rode his little scoot-mobile and I walked carrying our daypack. Once we got to the open squares along the way to our favorite “Three Bears” playground Theo would jump off his scooter and run all over the grass chasing the pigeons. Great exercise for him and the birds! I was so grateful we were having this time in the city because it made it easy to teach street safety at each and every corner. At every corner I would ask what we should do and Theo would chime back we should stop and wait to hold my hand before we crossed the street.

We one day we get to the square and Theo takes off to chase pigeons. I do my usual thing, bend down to pick up the scooter and follow to watch. But when I look up, I don't see Theo. I start yelling his name and hustling across the grass scaring up the pigeons myself. I am in the middle of the block park turning all around calling his name starting to feel desperate someone has taken him. Moments later this 3-piece suit jogs toward me with Theo in his arms. He said he was crossing the street and saw him running across the street toward him. He knew this was wrong, so he grabbed him and got him back to the sidewalk when he heard me calling and came to me with Theo. I was SO angry at Theo for running off and running across the street I wanted to kill him. But I was so relieved to have him back in my arms and with me again too. I just wanted to hold him with that fierce love forever.

What if the love of God is that fierce and intense? What if we knew how much it means to God to hold us, to almost squish us, so we could feel our hearts beating as one? But that is in fact not how we live. You and I run off and cross streets without holding hands first.

I invite all of us to a holy Lent of being rescued in the middle of the street. Of being squished in God's arms and smothered in “I'm so glad you are safe! Why did you run off? Thank you, mister, for rescuing my son! Theo, I love you. Don't you ever do that again!” Of returning to the practice of holding hands first before we cross the street.

During the next five weeks we will keep rereading parts of the Litany to launch our experimenting, testing, trying out of some different Spiritual Practices. Your first thought or question might be, “Why spiritual practices, I thought I was just supposed to give up something for Lent?” “How much is this going to hurt?” “I have never been able to meditate. My brain just does not shut up.”

I would like to nudge you into thinking about spiritual practices a little more broadly and kindly. A spiritual practice is any action that connects body, mind, and heart in the hope of hearing God – feeling God’s presence. Having said that I want to also guide our thoughts away from grading our practice or abilities. God is mysterious. Bit by bit is how we are going to understand anything spiritual. That is the bad news and the good news.

So, we will start where we are, each of us and together. I have a list all the activities that could be considered spiritual practices for you to look at. I will email this, and it will be posted on our website under spiritual practices library in the Lent page. Today, I want you to look at the list and mark the ones you have done or are doing. I would like you to send me mention of these plus I want to have you tell me via email 5 or more practices you want to try or at least know more about. Your experiences already and what you are curious about today will lead us. I am going to pick up with your suggestions so that the next 5 weeks become something we design together.

Each week will be self-contained so anyone can join at any point and feel welcome. I will post a library of resources and a question or prompt and topics for each week too. That is why I will wait to hear from you. Even if you are not sure you want to continue with the class or you will not make every week that does not matter. I still want to hear from you.

Learning about spiritual practices is not a churchy way for us to talk about coping with COVID stress and depression. Both Old and New testament scripture includes “sightings”. They always were and are today invitations by God we respond to with “Yes” Spiritual Practices can be done alone and they also happen in company with others. Over your life they are sure to vary and adapt. Any Spiritual Practice serves if it helps you to hear God and any Spiritual Practice does not serve if it does not help you to hear God. It is as simple as that.