

## 1) Singing 1: Songs of Resistance

READ

Acts 16:16–34

REFLECT

*We sing to God for many reasons—to celebrate our victories and grieve our losses, to confess our failures and express our thanks. But the kind of singing I want us to focus on today is the kind of singing that Paul and Silas were doing. Singing songs of resistance. Songs about what’s real and what isn’t. Songs about who has power and who doesn’t. Songs that remind us that even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, our God is with us, and we need fear no evil.*

(Pastor Jacob, July 9)

PRACTICE

Go to a quiet, dark room. Imagine you’ve been imprisoned because of your faith in Christ. What songs can you sing to express your faith that God is with you and will save you? You need to know at least some of the lyrics by heart and be able to sing them without accompaniment. Sing those songs in the darkness to God.

## 2) Singing 2: Songs of Joy

READ

Psalm 96:1–13

REFLECT

*As a child and teenager, I went to camp at Spruce Lake every summer, and one of the songs we always sang was called “Undignified.” It’s based on David leaping and dancing half-naked before the Lord and all the people in 2 Samuel 6. His wife criticizes him for “exposing himself in plain view of the female servants of his subjects like any indecent person would!” And David responds that he will celebrate and “become even more undignified than this.” It’s a weird story. But it makes a good song. So we sang this song, “I will dance and I will sing to be mad for my king. Nothing, Lord, is hindering this passion in my soul. And I’ll become even more undignified than this. Woo! Some may say it’s foolishness. But I’ll become even more undignified than this.” Well, today I’m inviting us all to sing and make big undignified ruckus for God.*

(Pastor Michelle, September 3)

PRACTICE

Psalm 96 gives lots of instructions. Sing! Share! Declare! Bow down! So that’s what you’re going to do. Go to a quiet place and read through the psalm, line by line. Every time it tells you to do something, do it. Be as loud and silly as possible. You’re getting used to singing for joy! Think about how you might continue in this spirit of unashamed praise when you go back into the world.

### 3) Testimony 1: Then and Now

READ

John 9:1–25

REFLECT

*Testimony is a statement about what happened. When people give testimony in court, they say publicly what they saw and heard and experienced. The Christian practice of testimony is the same. It's a statement about what happened in our lives because of Jesus.*

(Pastor Michelle, July 16)

PRACTICE

The man in our story says, “I was blind. Now I see.” Where in your life can you say that? Or something similar? Maybe it wasn't physical healing. Maybe your story is, “I was ashamed. Now I'm unashamed.” Or “I was despairing. Now I have hope.” Or “I was lonely. Now I'm in community.” Whatever it is, take the blind man's statement and make it your own. “I was \_\_\_\_\_. Now I \_\_\_\_\_.” Just put one or two words in the blanks. Now write down a few notes about how you would tell your story in more detail if someone were to ask you about it. How would you explain where you were then, and where you are now?

### 4) Testimony 2: Then and God and Now

READ

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

REFLECT

*While many Christians today believe that testimonies should always be positive in order to draw others into the faith, Paul's viewpoint was different. He didn't come to Corinth armed with eloquent speeches or complex explanations. He didn't arrive with a litany of the miracles and wonders that God had performed through him. Instead, he chose to approach the Corinthians in vulnerability and defenselessness.*

(Perdian Tumanan, August 27)

PRACTICE

The first time you practiced testimony, you took the testimony of the blind man and made it your own. “I was \_\_\_\_\_. Now I \_\_\_\_\_.” Now you're going to take the next step. You're going to say something about God. What did God do in between those two sentences? Or what might God have done? “I was \_\_\_\_\_. Then God \_\_\_\_\_. Now I \_\_\_\_\_.” Fill in the blanks with a word or two. Jot down some more notes about how you would tell this story. Who might you tell it to? What would make you hesitate? What would you need to get over that hesitation?

### 5) Scripture 1: Heart Words

READ

Matthew 4:1–11

REFLECT

*Jesus quotes Scripture to counter the devil. But Jesus would not have been able to call up the appropriate passages in this extraordinary moment without having studied Scripture diligently at ordinary times. So if we're going to resist temptation, we need to study Scripture, preferably all our lives. (Jenny Duskey, July 23)*

PRACTICE

Jesus is able to resist temptation because he has Scripture deep in his heart. Specifically, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13. What are your “heart scriptures” that you turn to when you feel tempted, weak, lost, or overwhelmed? Write them down. If you're artsy, write them in calligraphy and post them somewhere you'll see them every day. And if you don't have any “heart scriptures,” start reading through one of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. As you go, notice which verses seem to speak directly to your life. Write them down.

### 6) Scripture 2: Ancient Commandments for Modern Life

READ

Deuteronomy 30:11–20

REFLECT

*God's word is not too far from us. And it's not too hard for us. I think God still uses scripture to show us which way leads to life and which way leads to death. But I also think that reading scripture isn't always simple or straightforward. Sometimes I read scripture and I say, “Oh!”, and it makes sense of something I've been chewing on for weeks or months or years. Sometimes. Other times I read scripture and I say, “Huh?” or “Ew!” or “Meh.” When that happens, what I've learned to do—and what I would encourage you to do—is not to leave it at that. You can set it aside for a while if you need to. But come back to it. Keep coming back to it. (Pastor Jacob, September 10)*

PRACTICE

Get your Bible, open it to Deuteronomy, and write out a few of the following verses: 15:1–2, 17:16–17, 19:14, 22:1–2, 22:8, 24:14–15, 25:13–15. For each of these commandments, jot down answers to the following questions:

- 1) Who was this commandment for originally?
- 2) What is the way that leads to life for that person or group?

- 3) Who might this commandment be for today?  
 4) What is the way that leads to life for that person or group?  
 5) How might this be a commandment for you?  
 When you get used to this method of applying Biblical teaching, you can use it all over the Bible!

### 7) Giving 1: Skills

READ

Exodus 35:20–29

REFLECT

*All of us at Ambler Mennonite Church are a team too. We're a team trying to live like Jesus together. This can be every bit as difficult as what those other teams are doing. It can be just as dangerous. And if we want to accomplish our goal together, then we, like the other teams, need different people with different skills to fill different roles. Which, my friends, is the Christian practice of giving. (Pastor Jacob, July 30)*

PRACTICE

Write down three skills God has given you that you don't currently use at Ambler Mennonite Church but might like to. How might you use those skills as part of our team? If you can't imagine what that would look like, talk to Pastor Michelle or Jacob!

### 8) Giving 2: Money

READ

2 Corinthians 8:1–15

REFLECT

*Friends, I do not want you to give out of guilt. I do not want you to give because you're afraid that if you don't, the church won't make its budget. Or because you feel ashamed to live in plenty while being by bombarded images of those in need. And I also do not want you to feel guilt when you receive. American culture tells us the lie that we're supposed to be self-sufficient. But in fact all of us need each other. And it's good to need each other. It's by giving and receiving that we build relationships. (Pastor Michelle, October 1)*

PRACTICE

When have you been able to give money joyfully—out of a sense that you have enough, that you can afford to be generous, and that giving is a way of strengthening your relationship with the person who's receiving? And when have you been able to receive money joyfully? Jot down a few examples of each. What would it look like to do more of your giving and receiving joyfully, and less out of a sense of guilt or obligation?

### 9) Praying 1: Lament

READ

Psalm 88:1–18

REFLECT

*Jesus said we have to become like little children to enter the kingdom. We tend to think he was talking about the cute, innocent, imaginative qualities of children. But I'm more and more convinced that Jesus would included the crying. Raphael cries when he needs something. He doesn't wonder if it's a convenient time or if his need really matters. He just cries. And he trusts that Jacob or I will meet his needs. And that's the tone of this psalm. It's crying out and not holding back and being loud and angry and keeping it up until God answers. (Pastor Michelle, August 6)*

PRACTICE

Go to a quiet, dark place. Light a candle. Then read the psalm again, out loud. Notice where the words connect to someone or something in your own life, either now or in the past. Hold that someone or something in your mind as you read, knowing that it is faithful and good to cry out to God like this.

### 10) Praying 2: Going to Your Safe Place

READ

Daniel 6:1–28

REFLECT

*The Christian practice of prayer over the course of a lifetime helped Daniel to turn to God when he was threatened with the lion's den. So I ask you, where is your safe space of the heart that you can go to plead with God, in everyday life and in times of trouble? Is it a house, mountain, or beach? Go in the quiet of the morning like Abraham, in the cool of the afternoon like Isaac, or in the dark of night like Jacob. Wherever it is that you feel "you can be you" ... quiet and free from distractions ... go there! Talk with God. He is waiting for you. (Ellen McCaffrey, August 20)*

PRACTICE

Where is your safe place? Where do you go to get away from the world? To find refuge? Go there and pray. Even if it's just for a minute or two. Tell God what's on your heart. And if you can't find the right words, try using words from the Bible instead. Here are some biblical prayers to get you started: 1 Samuel 2:1–2; 2 Chronicles 20:6, 12; Psalm 19:13–14; Psalm 25:4–5; Psalm 88:1–3; Proverbs 30:7–9; Jeremiah 14:7–9; Matthew 6:9–13.

### 11) Creating 1: What God Makes for Us

READ

Genesis 2:4–9

REFLECT

*As I was preparing for this morning I felt overwhelmed with the vastness of creation. Pastors Michelle and Jacob and the whole church will never run out of material, because all you need to do is start at the beginning and you'll never be finished. Within this created order, God provides for his creatures. In the ebb and flow of life, from the beginning to the end, through it all, God provides. (Rick Kratz, September 17)*

PRACTICE

Take some time to consider God's amazing creativity and provision. Make a list of the animals you run into in your day-to-day life: geese, foxes, deer, snakes, bluebirds, mice, flies ... Now, for each creature, answer the following questions:

- 1) What special gifts has God given this creature?
- 2) How does God provide food and shelter for it?
- 3) What role has God assigned to it in the ecosystem?

If you don't know the answers, do some searching online or in books. You'll be amazed at what you find!

### 12) Creating 2: What We Make for God

READ

Revelation 1:9–18

REFLECT

*Raphael is going to hear un-Jesus messages his whole life. The most dangerous ones won't be the ones that seem actively hostile to Jesus. They'll be the ones that take something good, something that belongs to Jesus, and suggest that they, not Jesus, can offer it. They'll try to fill Raphael's head with images of their version of the good life, which require their products and services. Of course, their promises will be empty. But if Raphael has nothing in his mind that's more real, more solid, better, brighter, then it will be easy for him to be drawn in. Which is why we, his parents, and we, his church, create. To give him something better to focus on. To direct his attention toward Jesus. (Pastor Jacob, August 13)*

PRACTICE

What do you make? Drawings? Digital images? Creative writing? Woodwork? Blankets? Knitwear? Vegetables? Honey? A beautifully decorated house? Whatever it is, what would it take for you to make that thing for Jesus? So that when others see it, they see Jesus in it? Jot down a few notes about what that might look like. And then, if you've got time, start working on your new project!

### 13) Hospitality

READ

Mark 2:1–12

REFLECT

*Imagine that you've been invited to a get-together. You hop in the car and drive to the house, careful to follow the directions you were given to get there. You pull up, and sure enough, there's a warm glow of light streaming from the front windows. This is the right place. You can hear music, laughter, the clinking of dishes. But as you get closer, you notice something strange. There's no front door. Confused, you walk around the building to look for the entrance. But nothing. You knock on the window, but no one seems to hear you. No one notices that you're outside, trying to get in. This is all too often what it feels like to live with a disability.*

PRACTICE

Think of someone you know who has a disability. In your mind, imagine you are that person, visiting our church for the first time. What is it like? What barriers do you face? What do we need to change so that you can find what you're looking for? Jot down some notes.

### 14) Justice

READ

Exodus 23:1–9

REFLECT

*Every one of the Ten Commandments has a floor and a ceiling. The “don't” part is the floor. It's the bare minimum required of you. Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery. If you break those rules—if you fall below that floor—then you sin. But that's not where the commandment ends. That's where it starts. Because far, far above that floor is a ceiling. Something to be continually reaching for. The floor of the Ninth Commandment, for example, is a don't. “Don't give false testimony against your neighbor.” Don't lie about your neighbor in court. But the ceiling is much higher. It's a do. Do speak truthfully about your neighbor. Do care about her. Do get to know her. Do look out for her. Do speak up for her when she needs someone on her side. Even if you hate her.*

PRACTICE

Write out the following 5 commandments:

- 1) You shall not murder.  
(Do not harm your neighbor's physical health.)
- 2) You shall not commit adultery.  
(Do not harm your neighbor's marriage.)
- 3) You shall not steal.  
(Do not harm your neighbor's possessions.)

4) You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

(Do not harm your neighbor's reputation.)

5) You shall not covet your neighbor's household.

(Do not harm your neighbor's household.)

These commandments, from Exodus 20:13–17, tell us how to do justice for our neighbors. But they only give us the “floor”—what not to do. For each one, write what the “ceiling” might be. How might you build up your neighbor's physical health, marriage, possessions, reputation, and household?

### 15) Christian Friendship

READ

Job 2:11–13

REFLECT

*If you feel like you're lost in this epidemic of loneliness, then maybe the idea of Christian friendship feels out of reach. Before you can go about inviting God into a friendship, you need a friend. If that's you, you've already taken the first step by being here at church. Use this resource. Keep showing up and rubbing shoulders with people who love you. If you want to talk, Pastor Jacob or I would love to strategize with you about how to build up the friendships you need. Lean on your relationship with God, and lean on your relationship with this church. Know that God doesn't want you to*

*be lonely, and your church family doesn't want you to be lonely either. (Pastor Michelle, October 22)*

PRACTICE

Commit to take one of the following steps in the coming week!

If you need a friend:

- 1) Ask God to help you connect with someone.
- 2) Ask someone at church to pray for you.
- 3) Brainstorm with one of the pastors about how to start or deepen a friendship
- 4) Initiate something (a walk, a movie, an exchange of letters) with someone at church.

If you have a friendship you'd like to be more explicitly Christian:

- 1) Suggest that you pray for each other.
- 2) Share a podcast or article about faith and ask their opinion.
- 3) Ask them to hold you accountable in sticking to a Christian practice.
- 4) Listen to something they're struggling with, and sit with them in silence.

### 16) Wisdom

READ

Proverbs 3:1–12

REFLECT



*God has made it so that our actions have certain predictable consequences. Some of these consequences are immediate and obvious. If you drop a stone off a cliff, it falls. Everybody knows this. But other actions have consequences that play out more slowly. You can do things now with consequences you'll see only much later, if you see them at all. And that's why you need wisdom. So you can take that long-term view. So you can avoid actions that seem like convenient shortcuts, but, over time, harm you and the people around you. So you can, instead, take the actions that require patience and commitment, that cost you more and seem to reward you less, but, over time, lead to life. That's wisdom. (Pastor Jacob, October 29)*

#### **PRACTICE**

When were you not wise in the ways Proverbs 3:1–12 advises? Proverbs 3:3 says, “Let love and faithfulness never leave you.” When were you not loyal—to a friend, or to God? Proverbs 3:7 says, “Do not be wise in your own eyes.” When did you try something you weren't able for and fall flat on your face? Proverbs 3:11 says, “Do not despise the Lord's discipline.” When did you stubbornly refuse to be corrected? Jot down some notes for each question. Then think about how you might tell these stories to a younger person in your life, so they can learn from your mistakes.

## **17) Sabbath**

### **READ**

Exodus 16:22–30

### **REFLECT**

*The most literal meaning of the word “Sabbath” is “stop.” “To sabbath” is “to stop” what we're doing. To rest from our work. To honor our limits. To remember that God is God and we are not. That's what the aching in my back made me do: Stop. All through college I had been working so hard to Sabbath, but I had started to miss the point. I thought I could add Sabbath into my busy life as one more thing to do. The aching in my back made me stop. It made me realize that I had missed the spirit of the law. The spirit of the commandment “observe the sabbath” is honoring our need for sane rhythms of work and rest. (Pastor Michelle, November 5)*

### **PRACTICE**

This exercise is from Barbara Brown Taylor: “On one side of a piece of paper, list all of the things you know give you life that you never take time to do. Then, on the other side, make a list of all the reasons why you think it is impossible for you to do those things. That is all there is to it. Just make the two lists, and keep the piece of paper where you can see it. Also promise not to shush your heart when it howls for the list it wants.”

**17) Passing on Faith****READ**

Deuteronomy 6:1–12

**REFLECT**

*Deuteronomy commands you to talk about what God has done for you, and how God has taught you to live. And the reason it gives is not that you'll benefit from the talking. It's that others will. Your children. Or whatever children are in your life. That's who needs to hear from you. Because yes, they can see your faith in action. They can see your example. But unless you explain it to them, they won't know how you got that way. Maybe they'll see that you're strong in hard times and hopeful even when everything seems dark, but they won't know you get the strength from Jesus. Unless you tell them. (Pastor Jacob, November 12)*

**PRACTICE**

How would you explain your faith to someone younger than you? If you don't know a lot of kids, think of one of the kids in our church. What would you say if you had five minutes to tell them about God? Make notes of what your main points would be. Try practicing out loud by yourself. Are there kids who are already asking you about your faith, either directly or indirectly?

**18) Fasting****READ**

Esther 4:1–16

**REFLECT**

*Fasting is when you don't eat. To be more precise, it's when you choose to restrict how much food and water you put into our body for a certain period—from part of a day to a week or longer. There are complete fasts, and partial fasts, and fasts from things other than food, but to make things simple, let's just say that fasting is deciding not to eat for a while. In the Bible, people fast for two reasons. The first is that something terrible is happening to them. I call this the fast of grief. And the second reason is that they're getting ready to do something difficult or dangerous. I call this the fast of preparation. (Pastor Jacob, November 19)*

**PRACTICE**

Where might be God calling you to fast, either in grief or in preparation? What is going on around you that leaves you sad or angry or scared, that makes you want throw yourself down before God and say, "This is too big for me. God, I need you."? And where in your life are you getting ready to do something difficult or dangerous, and you need to clear your mind so God can work? Make some notes. Is there anyone you'd be willing to share this with? Anyone who might join you in fasting?

## 19) Silence and Solitude

### READ

Mark 1:32–38

### REFLECT

*Every once in a while, I've received something from God in the practice of silence and solitude that felt like a huge insight or a big breathe of fresh air. But more often, it's subtler than that. More often, it just feels like hanging out with God. It's very much like hanging out with any other friend. Sometimes we connect really deeply and it takes our friendship to the next level or shifts something significant inside one of us. But most of the time, hanging out is just hanging out. It builds the friendship in that slow way of accumulated shared time. (Pastor Michelle, November 26)*

### PRACTICE

Go to a quiet place and be silent for 5 minutes. Make sure your phone is on “do not disturb.” Find a comfortable position. If you need to lie on the floor to get quiet, do that. Say to God, “Here I am.” Then quiet your mind and focus on God. If it helps, repeat the words of Psalm 62:1: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.” If you find yourself getting distracted, tell God about it, then gently bring your attention back. Listen for what God might be saying.

## 20) Waiting

### READ

Luke 1:26–56

### REFLECT

*That day I turned everything over to God: my tears, my heart, my worry, my fear, my hurt, my migraine headaches. I said yes to God being in control. I didn't apply to any more districts or any other jobs. I waited for God. He was my protector. I didn't know what was going to happen in the end, but I knew who did, so I just waited, confident He would supply all my needs. It was in the waiting, when I let go, that God could bless me. (Ellen McCaffrey, December 3)*

*Christian waiting is not doing nothing, but it's also not making ourselves relentlessly busy. It's not ignoring the thing we're waiting for, nor is it frantically doing everything in our power to make the thing happen.*

*Christian waiting is the practice of preparing for what God will do. It's getting things ready, physically in the material world, and also emotionally and spiritually, in our hearts and relationships. (Pastor Michelle, December 10)*

*In English the words “wait” and “hope” are different. But In Hebrew, there is one verb, “qavah,” which can be translated either as “wait” or “hope.” When we wait by trying not to think about what we're waiting*

*for, or by trying to take the matter into our own hands, both missteps are caused by a lack of hope. We're waiting, but not hoping. But when we feel the strength of God's love, we can wait with hope even when the waiting is long and seemingly without results. (Jenny Duskey, December 17)*

*God has never given up the work that was begun in Jesus. But if you're waiting to see where and how God is doing that, don't look in the White House or the Kremlin, on Jeff Bezos's private island or in Elon Musk's undersea bunker. Because God's justice begins where it always has—not in the capital city but in the little villages, not with the important men in charge but with the disgraced teenage girl who gives birth to her baby in the back shed because there's no room for her in the house. (Pastor Jacob, December 24)*

#### PRACTICE

As you wait to see what God is growing in you, try doing what Christians for centuries have called an “examen of consciousness.” Close your eyes. Start by being still and knowing how much God loves you. Hear God say to you, “You are my beloved child.” Then invite God to go with you as you search for evidence of God's presence. Bring to mind the major events of the last week, and as you picture each one, notice where God seemed to be loving you, speaking to you, or guiding you. Ask

God to show you what God is growing. Can you say “yes” to this? Is there someone who will wait with you as it grows? How will you stay hopeful when the waiting gets long and difficult? What in you needs to be lifted up or brought down for this thing to grow?