



*Vertical
Habits*

HANDBOOK

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

MEMORIAL DRIVE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Lent at MDUMC

To read the digital version of this devotional, find the Holy Week schedule, and access online resources, visit mdumc.org/lent or scan the QR code below!



MEMORIAL DRIVE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Communication is the key to every healthy relationship, which is why we're exploring some Vertical Habits this Lent at MDUMC. These are biblical practices for communicating with God that we hope will help you to deepen both your relationship with God and your understanding of Christian worship.

Throughout this devotional guide, you'll find familiar phrases like "I love you" paired with worship words like "Praise." These worship words can help us form healthy habits in our relationship with God and in the way we live out our faith.

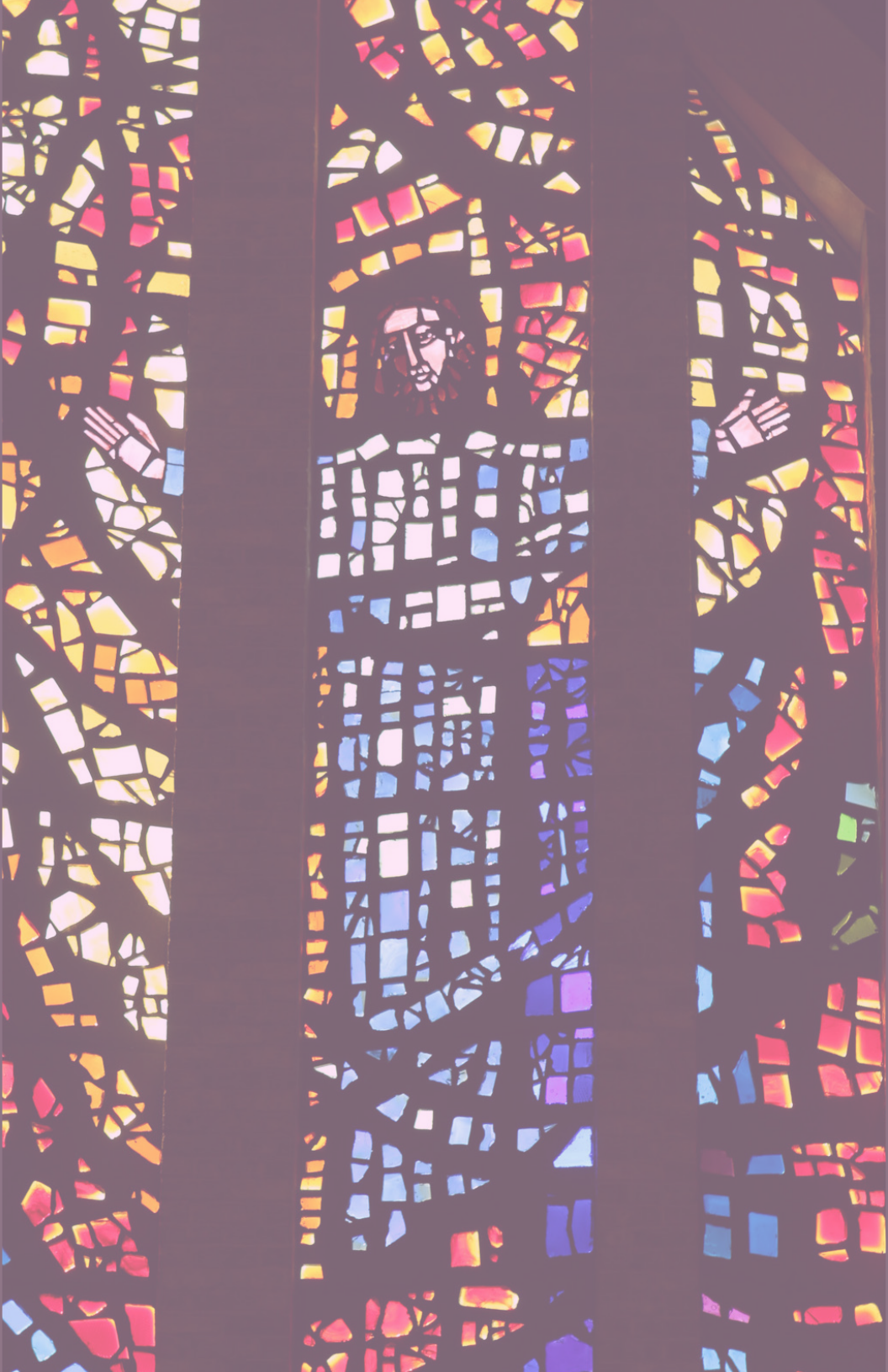
Short reflections from MDUMC members or pastors accompany each worship word, and we'll be exploring all of them further in Sunday morning services throughout this holy season. I hope you'll join in as we build strong Vertical Habits here at MDUMC, beginning with this blessing from Psalm 103:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

(Psalm 103:1-5)

Enjoy!
Pastor Seann

Note: all scriptures in this devotional are from the NRSV translation.



The background is a close-up of a stained glass window. It features a repeating diamond-shaped leaded glass pattern. The lead lines are dark, and the glass panes are filled with various colors: light beige, grey, and red. A prominent vertical red leaded glass strip runs down the right side of the image. In the center, there is a semi-transparent tan rectangular box with a thin white border. Inside this box, the text is centered.

I'M SORRY

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CONFESSION

I'm Sorry

—

Confession

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 51:1-17

*¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.*

*² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.*

*⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.*

*⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.*

*⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.*

*⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

*⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*

*⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.*

*¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.*

*¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.*

*¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

*¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.*

*¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.*

*¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.*

*¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.*

*¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

I'm Sorry
—
Confession

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 51:1-17

I cannot tell you how many times I have prayed these words.

Psalms 51 is one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible because it is a reminder that even though I constantly miss the mark, God will cleanse me. He will make me new. He will wipe away my sins and remember them no more.

I take comfort in these words from David. Even when one of the great kings of Israel was at his lowest point, he confessed and was forgiven. He remembered God's infinite grace.

I find it helpful to read through these verses when I'm feeling like a failure, when I've made poor choices, or when I know that I've done something wrong. I usually first try to hide from that admission, but when I confess to God in prayer, I am reminded of his boundless grace.

There is nothing I can do to separate me from his love. Period.

And so, He reminds me that I am forgiven, and I find myself encouraged and renewed — ready to try (and fail) again.

CLAYTON BOLDT | Lenten Leadership Cohort

I'm Sorry

—

Confession

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 51:1-17

God, I'm sorry that I don't put you first in everything I do. I'm sorry that I get distracted during worship and start thinking of my to do list for that day. I'm sorry for the things I have done and the things I have left undone. I'm sorry to have missed the mark today, and yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that...I'm sorry that I've always been this way. But God, thank you for your mighty grace. Thank you for making me clean day in and day out. Thank you for the love that wraps its way into every part of my life. Thank you for the peace that surpasses all understanding. Thank you for the opportunity to "teach transgressors your ways" like it says in the Psalms. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for allowing me to believe in myself. I'm sorry, but thank you.

CAROLINE STONE | High School Ministry Coordinator

I'm Sorry
–
Confession

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 51:1-17

These two simple words are probably the hardest for us to say because it requires vulnerability and trust. It requires vulnerability because it's my acknowledgment that I actually don't have it all together and that I'm the source of the wrong being caused (towards self, towards others, towards God). It requires trust because I can't control how or whether my vulnerability will be accepted. And so, the risk feels too big, too weighty... and altogether too powerful.

Entrusting my vulnerability to another by saying "I'm sorry" is a daring act of faith that believes the release of forgiveness to be far better than the constraints of certitude. This is why worship is incomplete without the practice of confession, where we dare to believe that God will meet all our sin, our guilt, our shame, our vulnerabilities with forgiveness, with grace.

In worship, we rehearse this over and over again because we need it. We need it to help us know and believe that God is good and forgiveness is possible. We need it to help us know that we can forgive each other and be forgiven by each other. We need it because the real joy of living requires the release and relief that only grace and the practice of grace can give.

Saying "I'm sorry" and confessing our sins before God and each other, invites transformation of me, of you, of us...IF we are willing. It only takes vulnerability and trust.

REV. DEANDRE JOHNSON | Associate Pastor Discipleship

I'm Sorry
—
Confession

VERTICAL HABIT

REFLECTION

How can the practice of confession lead to a deeper sense of God's mercy and renewal in your life this Lent? What is God inviting you to confess, and how can you open your heart to His healing and forgiveness?

Lord, I'm sorry for the times I've gotten distracted and failed to put You first, but thank You for Your constant grace, love, and peace that transform my heart and renew me daily. Help me to focus more on You and grow in Your presence each day. Amen.

A close-up photograph of a stained glass window. The window features a central white cross shape, surrounded by various colored glass pieces in shades of yellow, orange, red, blue, and green. The background is a dark, muted teal color. A white rectangular box is centered on the page, containing the text.

I LOVE YOU

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PRAISE

11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

I Love You
–
Praise

VERTICAL HABIT

LUKE 15:11-32

I keep thinking of the father of the prodigal son, and, as a parent, put myself in his shoes. I can understand what his feelings were... complete relief, joy, elation, gratitude and pure love upon the return of his child.

And for the older brother, the phrase “comparison is the thief of joy” comes to mind... a phrase that I used to have taped to my bathroom mirror, and is now especially applicable to my three sons and their natural sibling rivalry.

The older son was loyal and present, but insecure of his place, although equally loved and cherished. The younger son was unsteady and self centered, but adored just the same.

We all take different paths in our relationship with Christ, and each of us need to be shown grace and love in different ways. What a wonderful reminder that we should never compare our relationship with Christ to what we think others’ relationships may be. I will strive to rest easy in knowing that Christ loves me just as I need to be loved, and if I stray, will celebrate and love me in exactly the way that I need.

JULIA SMITH | Lenten Leadership Cohort

I Love You

—

Praise

VERTICAL HABIT

LUKE 15:11-32

Love is always the first emotion I feel when I get home each day. Immediately after walking into the house, my daughter Rosie will excitedly say “Daddy!” and ask to be picked up for hugs and kisses. Carson always gives me a kiss and tells me she loves me. Within those first thirty seconds, any worries or problems I might have had from the day are quickly thrown out the window. Love has changed me for the better. By knowing I am worthy of love, my first emotion has also become to show others love.

Receiving love can change our mindset, day, and even the trajectory of our life. We see proof of this within the Parable of the Lost Son. The father truly embodies what it means to love. I’m sure he might have felt anger and disappointment for the way his son left and the decisions he made. However, when he sees him returning in the distance, “he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” The father chose to show him love and praise for returning home. That simple action of choosing love made the son feel worthy and whole again — something I’m sure he had not felt in quite some time.

Love is an intense feeling of deep emotion, that when given or received, always seems to multiply exponentially. How might our act of loving others bleed into their lives and snowball into something larger? I invite you, today and every day, to choose love.

DANY ATTAL | Director of Singles & Older Adult Ministries

I Love You
–
Praise

VERTICAL HABIT

LUKE 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is certainly one of the best known of Jesus' parables. There are so many ways to view and understand this parable. One of the major points Jesus taught centers around the love of the Father for his sons, even his wayward son, and even his unforgiving son.

As a dad, I can begin to understand the immense love the father has for his sons. I have two daughters that I love and cherish greatly. I remember when one was working in Washington DC, and she came home for Easter. I did not know she was able to come home for Easter weekend. When I ran home for just a few minutes before our Maundy Thursday service, she was standing in our family room. I was thrilled and overcome with great joy and love.

Jesus paints such a picture of God's love for us, even those of us who turn away, who reject his love, who neglect his love, or who forget his love.

Worship is our opportunity to express our love for God. We can demonstrate our love for God as we praise God through hymns, in prayers, in hearing the reading of his Word, and in listening to sermons. We praise God for his great love for us. As we praise God, we are acknowledging his blessings, forgiveness, grace, and love that he so generously bestows on us. When we praise God, we are declaring our love for God.

The vertical habit of worship enables us to declare our love for God and we praise God and experience his awesome love and amazing grace for each and everyone of us.

REV. JIM MCPHAIL | Associate Pastor Congregational Care

I Love You
–
Praise

VERTICAL HABIT

REFLECTION

The father in this scripture passage responds to his son's return with joyful celebration and love. How often do you take time to praise God for His grace in your life? This Lent, how can you develop a habit of expressing love and gratitude to God, not just in moments of blessing but in all circumstances?

Lord, Your love is unrelenting and full of grace. When I wander, You welcome me back with open arms. Teach me to rest in Your mercy and to rejoice in the redemption of others. Let my heart reflect Your compassion and love. Amen.



WHY?

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LAMENT

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

LAMENTATIONS 1:18-22

*¹⁸ The Lord is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;
but hear, all you peoples,
and behold my suffering;
my young women and young men
have gone into captivity.*

*¹⁹ I called to my lovers
but they deceived me;
my priests and elders
perished in the city
while seeking food
to revive their strength.*

*²⁰ See, O Lord, how distressed I am;
my stomach churns,
my heart is wrung within me,
because I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword bereaves;
in the house it is like death.*

*²¹ They heard how I was groaning,
with no one to comfort me.
All my enemies heard of my trouble;
they are glad that you have done it.
Bring on the day you have announced,
and let them be as I am.*

*²² Let all their evil doing come before you;
and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;
for my groans are many
and my heart is faint.*

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 13

*¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?*

*² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

*³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
⁶ I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

LAMENTATIONS 1:18-22
PSALM 13

Why is not a unique question for God's people. In Psalm 13, David brings his doubts and vulnerability before God. Last fall, I experienced two significant losses that shook me to my core. My prayers mirrored David's cries, "Will you forget me forever? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart?" (Psalm 13). Instead of trying to answer my "why" in that season, I sought to know God's true nature through the scriptures. In Exodus 34, we are reminded that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Thinking of God's mercy and grace was impossible in my darkest hour, but with time I witnessed his steadfast love through friends, family and the church. My hope is that you are comforted by God's nature in the midst of your "why."

ANNA MCMAHON | Lenten Leadership Cohort

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

LAMENTATIONS 1:18-22
PSALM 13

At some point in life, you will find yourself in a situation where you have difficulty seeing God there with you. You feel alone, lost, scared, etc. and you need answers, even to hard questions like, “Why?”.

As Christians we are taught to trust God with our whole heart, but what do we do when we don’t feel his presence? We are human. We have doubts. We ask, “why?” a lot, especially during hard times.

And you know what? That’s ok! God is bigger and better than any question or doubt we may have. He can handle it. Asking questions, such as why, is how we learn. Questions bring answers. Answers give information we can use to find understanding, which results in life experience that can help navigate future difficult times, hopefully making it easier to trust God.

Therefore, don’t be afraid to ask, “why.” Remember if we never ask a question, we will never know the answer.

BECKY BOGART | Director of Involvement

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

LAMENTATIONS 1:18-22
PSALM 13

There are so many times that I wonder, why? I watch the news, and I call out to God in frustration and despair to ask, why are these terrible things happening? Why are there terrible storms, flooding and fires? Why do so many live on the streets without food or housing? Why does my loved one have cancer? Why has my friend's daughter died? Why?

When I don't have the words to pray to God, I look to the book of Lamentations or the Psalms. Both of these books show us that we can pray to God with the honest words of our hearts. We don't have to pretend that we are not questioning God, or frustrated with God.

“See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me” Lamentations 1:20

“my groans are many and my heart is faint” Lamentations 1:22

To “lament” means to passionately express our sadness, grief, sorrow, or disappointments. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ himself wept and cried out to God in the Gospel of Matthew 26:39, “And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”

As we see in Psalm 13, we can question God: “How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?”

Thankfully, Psalm 13 also gives us the words that we can trust the Lord, and trust in God's steadfast love. God hears our prayers, and our hearts can rejoice in our salvation. We can sing to the Lord because of God's faithful and bountiful blessings. This is good news. We can pour out our sadness, questions and frustrations, and God can hold these things for us. We can trust that God's goodness and love will prevail.

REV. JENNIFER GROS | Associate Pastor Worship

Why?

–

Lament

VERTICAL HABIT

REFLECTION

Lament allows us to bring our deepest pain and questions before God. When have you felt the need to cry out to God, asking “why?” How might practicing honest lament in your faith journey draw you closer to Him, even in seasons of distress?

Lord, I bring my questions and my pain before You. Teach me to trust that You can handle my deepest cries and doubts. Help me to lament honestly, knowing that You hear me and hold me in Your love. Even when I don't understand, keep my heart open to Your presence. Amen.

A vibrant stained glass window with a central figure, possibly a religious icon, rendered in shades of blue, yellow, and red. The background is composed of various colored glass panes in shades of blue, yellow, red, and green, separated by dark lead lines.

WHAT CAN I DO?

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SERVICE

What can I do?

—
Service

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 1:16-20

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

JOHN 12:20-26

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

What can I do?

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Service

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 1:16-20
JOHN 12:20-26

Just as Jesus called on his disciples to follow Him in Mark, Jesus calls on us to follow Him. As a busy mom with kids in lots of activities, it can be easy to ignore that call to follow Him.

There is this wonderful organization called Little Lights that provides opportunities for small children to see the power of answering that call to service. I can take my kids to pack lunches for children in need and the joy and love that I and my children experience by taking out a small amount of time in an afternoon is powerful and contagious. My kids are always excited and eager to participate, which is a reminder that we, as adults, should be excited and eager to participate as well.

BILLE ANN SWEENEY | Lenten Leadership Cohort

What can I do?

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Service

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 1:16-20

JOHN 12:20-26

Many of you know I give a children's sermon in worship each week. At these times, I often challenge the children to do something specific later that day or week. The concept is simple — to remind or teach the children that we need to live out our faith once we leave the Sanctuary or worship space.

I am also reminded of this when I lead a training of children to become acolytes for classic worship. I teach them that they are lighting an important worship symbol, and the light they bring into worship is that of Christ. Likewise, at the end of worship, they relight their candle holder and literally take the light of Christ out into the world (out of the physical room, the Sanctuary).

We often think of serving others as a complicated addition to our busy calendars, when Jesus wants us to simply 'follow him' and serve others wherever we find ourselves in our daily life.

Here is your challenge: think as a child would and simply just serve as a Christian in any given moment, in any way you can.

ALLYSON GEORGE | Director of Children's Ministries

What can I do?

– *Service*

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 1:16-20
JOHN 12:20-26

In Mark chapter 1, Jesus calls out to his first four disciples Peter, Andrew, James, and John and tells them to “*follow me.*” As Mark makes clear, the disciples “immediately” dropped their nets, abandoned their old lives and familial relationships, and began to follow Jesus. Luckily, Jesus does not expect or require us to abandon our family, friends, or jobs. But being in relationship with Jesus should transform our goals and priorities and change how we spend our time and money.

As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus and to serve others according to the examples set by Jesus. The Bible is clear that Jesus served the weak and the outcast, and those whom the politically and religiously powerful ignored, belittled, and persecuted.

One of the best things about MDUMC is the opportunities it provides to serve others. As examples, you may choose to teach children or adults, to prepare or distribute food to the hungry, or to comfort people in times of personal crisis.

In John chapter 12, Jesus told his disciples “*Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.*” We serve and follow Jesus by acting in the world in the places where Jesus acted and choosing to help and serve the types of people that Jesus helped and served. Put simply, Jesus helped the poor and the vulnerable. As Christians and followers of Jesus, we are called to as well.

During this Lenten season, perhaps you would consider challenging yourself to expand or escape your comfort zone and volunteer in an area of service that you have not done before or not done recently. The church makes it easy, and you will be with your friends and your church community. I hope to see you there.

JON RICE | Pastoral Intern

What can I do?

—
Service

VERTICAL HABIT

REFLECTION

Like the disciples, we are asked to serve others with whatever gifts and talents we have. How can you use what you already do in your daily life to serve others for God's Kingdom?

Lord, just as You called the disciples to serve You, help me hear Your call to serve others with the gifts You've given me. Give me the courage to step out of my comfort zone and serve with a heart like Yours—compassionate and sacrificial. Show me how to use every opportunity to share Your love and bring others into Your Kingdom. Amen.



I'M LISTENING

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ILLUMINATION

¹Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle.

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

I'm Listening
—
Illumination

VERTICAL HABIT

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11
JOHN 1:43-51

I have found that I do my best listening when I can escape the busyness of life and step into the calmness of His creation. I've always loved being outdoors and the spiritual therapy it brings me. It fills me with gratitude and thankfulness for being able to enjoy God's creation, which I think opens my heart to listen and absorb what God might have for me. It is a natural place for me to slow down and take a moment to embrace the silence and seek His presence.

I think of Samuel, who was able to hear God's voice when he was still and open. It reminds me that God's voice is often gentle, but it will find your heart if you're intentional about listening for it.

CHET MANNING | Lenten Leadership Cohort

I'm Listening

–

Illumination

VERTICAL HABIT

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11
JOHN 1:43-51

Growing up, my family went to church fairly regularly. I was taught about God and faith. I memorized what we said during service, I prayed when I was told to, and I followed the steps like was expected, but I never LISTENED for God. It wasn't until adulthood that God opened my eyes and ears to see and hear Him every day. I know we all want some life-altering, big, "come to Jesus" moment, but mine took time. It was me, not just accepting that life isn't luck or chance, but taking the time, day-by-day, to say, as Samuel did, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Knowing that God loves me enough to speak to me each day, inspires me to try to show the world that God is love, so that others may hear Him, too.

ASHLEY RUNDALL | Lenten Leadership Cohort

I'm Listening
–
Illumination

VERTICAL HABIT

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11
JOHN 1:43-51

To experience illumination is to have true things revealed to you. Very simply, when a motion-sensor nightlight kicks on as I stand on one end of an unfamiliar and previously dark hallway, that light illuminates the safe places to walk; it guides my steps.

In the traditional understanding of Christian Formation, the illuminative way is the second phase of the journey; one where we begin to have a more pervasive awareness of God's real, abiding presence in the particulars of our here and now.

Young Samuel (like many of us!) needs some guidance to realize that God is breaking into his circumstances. With Eli's help, he finally realizes that God desires his attentiveness. All relationships, including ours with God, require listening. The late professor and pastor David Augsburger wrote, "*Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.*" We demonstrate adoration for God when we listen.

Cultivating that awareness of God's presence and listening for God's will can lead us to a hunger for forms of prayer where we don't one-sidedly talk to God. Centering prayer engages the ears of our heart, and when we listen in prayer, true things are revealed to us.

You might think of this spiritual season of Lent as a long hallway to traverse. Invite God to illuminate your steps and practice quietly listening for God to speak grace and truth into your here and now.

REV. JENNY VERES-SCHRECEGOST | Associate Pastor
Contemplative & Stephen Ministries

I'm Listening
—
Illumination

VERTICAL HABIT

1 SAMUEL 3:1-11
JOHN 1:43-51

Do you take time to listen for God's voice in your daily life, or do you often get distracted by other things? What might be some barriers preventing you from hearing God's call?

Lord, I know You are calling me. Help me to quiet my heart and mind so that I can hear Your voice more clearly. Teach me to be ready to respond, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." Open my ears to Your guidance and give me the courage to follow where You lead. Amen.



HELP

-

SUPPLICATION

²¹ When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. ²² Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet ²³ and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” ²⁴ So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, “If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.” ²⁹ Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?” ³¹ And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, ‘Who touched me?’” ³² He looked all around to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” ³⁵ While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader’s house to say, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?” ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” ³⁷ He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, “Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.” ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha cum,” which means, “Little girl, get up!” ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Help

–

Supplication

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 5:21-43

When I read this passage, my mind drifts back to playing youth sports in the 90s. “Do not fear, only believe.” No fear – do you remember the t-shirts and bumper stickers? Growing up in a household skeptical of organized religion, this sentiment – no fear – was, quite honestly, ignorant. Of course there are things to fear. If only the No Fear marketing team had finished the thought – only believe – then I might have started to understand the necessity of faith at a much earlier age.

Things can get complicated the older you get – finances, jobs, spouses, kids, illness, death, politics, all the things. Life is tough! Adulthood is hard! But it’s tougher and harder without faith. I have experience with both sides of the aisle. I once viewed faith as a cop-out. A naïve way to throw up your hands and say that life is out of my control and I’m just here, existing. Over time, though, I realized faith wasn’t just a surrender. For me, faith is both a surrender and a call to action – prayer, worship, service – which, in turn, allows me to emerge from those difficult to dwell places in life.

Faith requires action much like that demonstrated by the bleeding woman from the passage. Doctors, treatments, medicines – worldly things - accomplished nothing for twelve years. But one simple act of faith, working her way through a crowd of people to make physical contact with Jesus, relieves her malady. I try to take the same conscious action each day – to choose faith – because my life is better when I make that choice. The alternative just doesn’t look appetizing like it once did.

TODD WESTFIELD | Lenten Leadership Cohort

Help

—

Supplication

VERTICAL HABIT

MARK 5:21-43

“Hey Siri... Help!” Have you ever wanted to say that? Or to lean into the power of Artificial Intelligence to get you out of a perplexing situation? Here’s what I know: If I’m asking Siri (or Alexa or Google) for help, it is a sure sign that I am in a place/posture/season of unhealth and exhaustion. Turning to the world-wide-web for clarity means my priorities lack grounding.

To avoid this place, I put on my Help! playlist. No, this is not just listening to Taylor Swift tracks on repeat (though I understand the temptation). My Help! playlist is a set of practices I do to help remember God’s presence by reconfiguring my rhythms of productivity by way of prayer, community, self-reflection, and rest. When I click “Play” my heart attunes to the reality that I am a child of God. That’s a profoundly centering truth!

Here’s what’s on my Help! playlist...

- Say thanks to God for the newness of the day just before you drink your first cup of coffee. Below is a prayer adapted from the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition that you could say: “God, thank you for the rest of the past night and for the gift of a new day, with all of its opportunities to connect with you and others. Help me fill this day with the peace and joy of serving you, so that this evening I can again give thanks to you.”
- Don’t listen to the news or morning radio shows as you head into work each day. Instead, jam out to music you love or an audiobook about something that really interests you.
- Take a cue from Mr. Rogers and make a ritual out of coming home from work. When you change out of your work clothes or pull off your dress shoes, take a deep breath and release the stress of the day to God.
- When you finally crash out at night, take a few moments to rest in God’s presence. This could be three to four deep breaths or a small prayer. Many Christians read this line from Psalm 4 before going to sleep: “I will lie down and fall asleep in peace because you alone, O God, let me live in peace.”

This can be played every day! That good sound is your soul thanking you.

Help
–
Supplication

VERTICAL HABIT

REFLECTION

What areas of your life do you need to trust Jesus with today? Are there situations where you've lost hope or stopped believing?

Lord, help me to trust You in my struggles. Strengthen my faith to believe that You can bring healing and peace to the areas of my life where I feel broken or hopeless. I trust in Your power and compassion. Amen



THANK YOU
-
THANKSGIVING

Thank you

—

Thanksgiving

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 30

*¹ I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up,
and did not let my foes rejoice over me.*

*² O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,
and you have healed me.*

*³ O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol,
restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.*

*⁴ Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.*

*⁵ For his anger is but for a moment;
his favor is for a lifetime.*

*Weeping may linger for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.*

*⁶ As for me, I said in my prosperity,
“I shall never be moved.”*

*⁷ By your favor, O Lord,
you had established me as a strong mountain;
you hid your face;
I was dismayed.*

*⁸ To you, O Lord, I cried,
and to the Lord I made supplication:*

*⁹ “What profit is there in my death,
if I go down to the Pit?*

*Will the dust praise you?
Will it tell of your faithfulness?*

*¹⁰ Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me!
O Lord, be my helper!”*

*¹¹ You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have taken off my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,*

*¹² so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.*

Thank you

—

Thanksgiving

VERTICAL HABIT

LUKE 19:28-40

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem ²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' " ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" ³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Thank you

—

Thanksgiving

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 30, LUKE 19:28-40

“These Stones Will Cry Out”

I love my job. Being a youth director is the best. We get to be involved in the spiritual lives of our youth, plus we wear shorts, tennis shoes, and t-shirts most of the year.

Holy Week is obviously a most important time for people of faith, and we do all we can to lift up the significance of the story of the last week of Jesus' life. One way that we do this is by having early morning breakfasts and devotionals for our youth. We eat, then we say a few words, then we send them forth. (I was going to say that we send them to school, but sending them “forth” sounds more Biblical.)

We also give the youth a smooth river stone with a simple cross marked on it to carry all week. We ask the youth to remember three things about these stones. First, is to remember the cross of Jesus Christ. Secondly, remember the huge stone that was rolled away from the tomb. Finally, we remind them of Jesus' words “that even the stones cry out.” **I urge each of you this week especially, but also every week, to remember these three things.**

STEVE CRAGG | The Refuge Kitchen Manager

Thank you

—

Thanksgiving

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 30, LUKE 19:28-40

I am a big fan of Thanksgiving. I love the parades, the food and the overall atmosphere of giving thanks. While most people tend to initially think of thanksgiving as the annual holiday; thanksgiving is so much more. Thanksgiving is a daily act of recognizing God's presence and goodness in our lives.

In our scripture reading of Psalm 30 we read about God's faithfulness in times of need. "You have drawn me up" (verse 1), "You have healed me" (verse 2). "You have turned my mourning into dancing" (verse 11). At the end of this passage we read "I will give thanks to you forever".

Giving thanks is a response. Just like we thank someone for helping us with a project or giving us a gift; we thank God for the faithfulness we are shown, and for the grace we are given. Thanksgiving helps us shift our focus from what is missing from our lives to what is present. Thankfulness is so much more than an annual tradition, it is forever. Have you given thanks today?

LAUREN BEDEVIAN | Director of Children's Ministries at the Journey

Thank you

—

Thanksgiving

VERTICAL HABIT

PSALM 30, LUKE 19:28-40

“Thank you.”

When people say that, I’ll sometimes respond with, “Oh, no need to thank me.” But it turns out that I’m a complicated guy, and if I do something kind or helpful or whatever and don’t receive a “Thank you,” I’ll walk away muttering, “Sheesh, they didn’t even say thank you...” So which is it? Is there no need to thank me, or do I really want you to thank me?

Even if there is no need, these are good words to say. “Thank you.” In our human relationships, words of thanks acknowledge that someone else has taken the time, the energy, the effort to do something for us. Words of thanks indicate that we appreciate the fact that their actions have been a benefit to us.

This is exactly why we thank God in worship — through psalms and prayers of thanksgiving, around the communion table, and in the songs we sing — to acknowledge anything and everything that God has done for us. God did not have to do those things, but God did. God took invested the time, the energy, the effort to provide for us.

And we thank God to show God that we appreciate — at least in some small way — that the things God has done have been for our benefit. God has acted in our lives, because God wants our lives to be full of love and joy and peace and beauty.

I don’t know whether God needs to hear our words of thanks. But I do know that we for sure need to say them. If don’t, we soon start to forget that everything good is a gift from God.

So...for life, for love. For joy, for peace. For health and hope. For beauty.

Thank you, God.

REV. SEANN DUFFIN | Senior Pastor

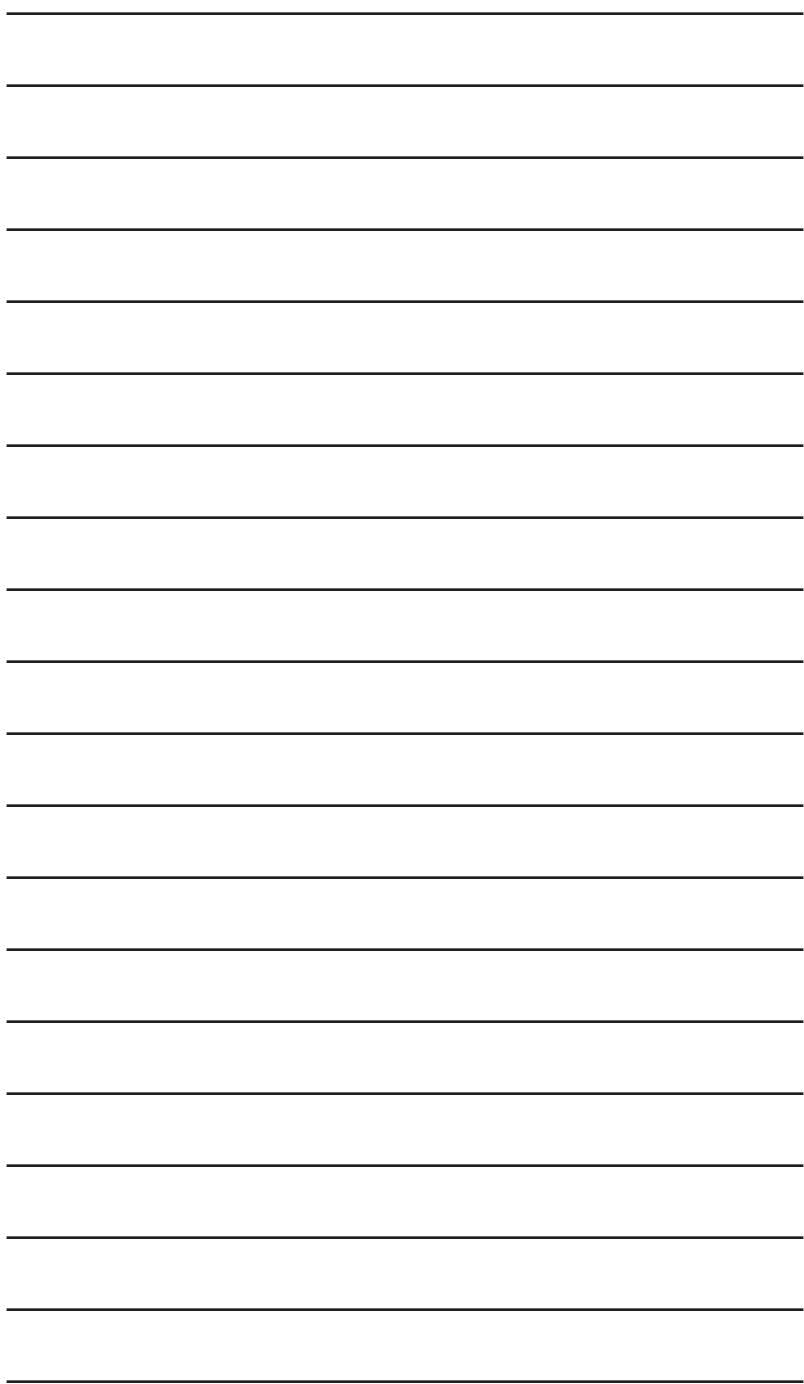
Thank you
–
Thanksgiving

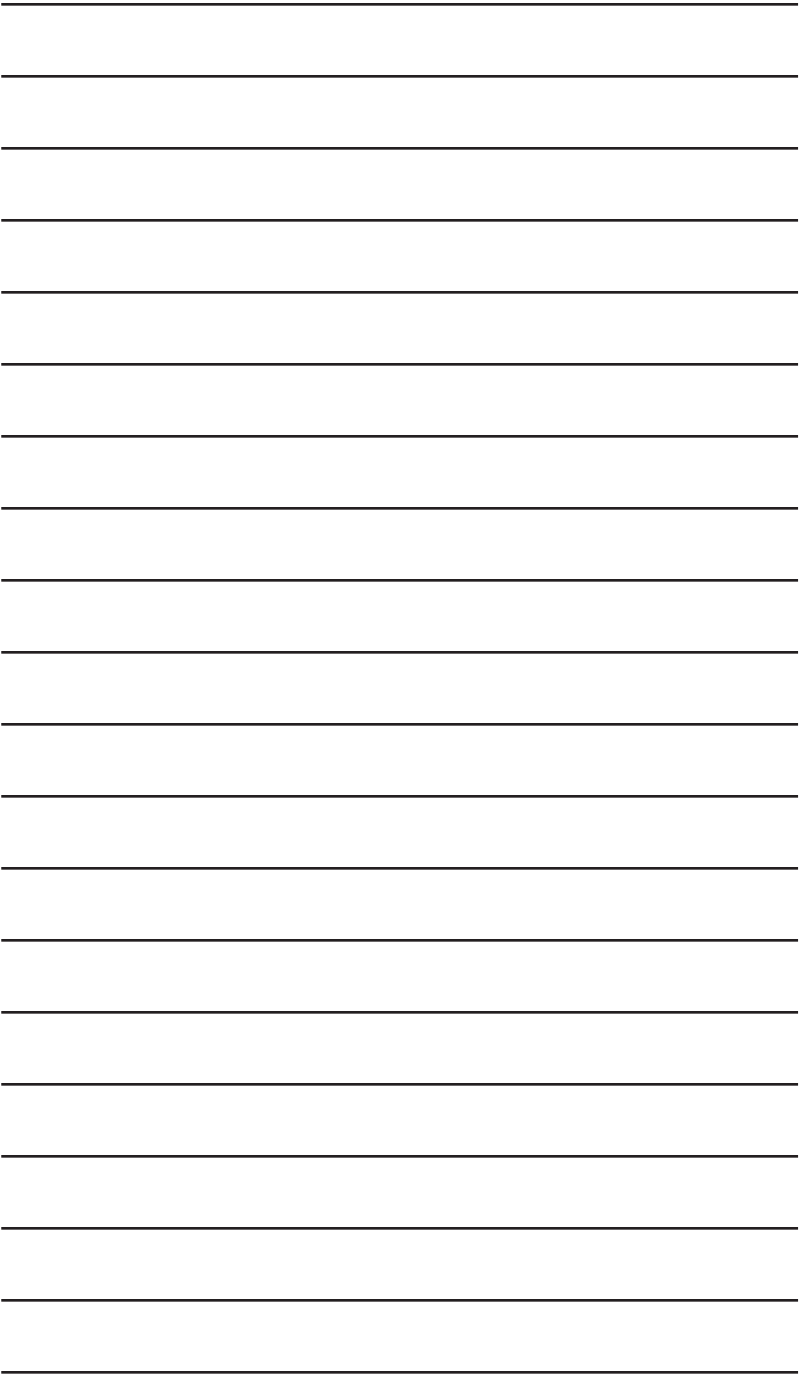
VERTICAL HABIT

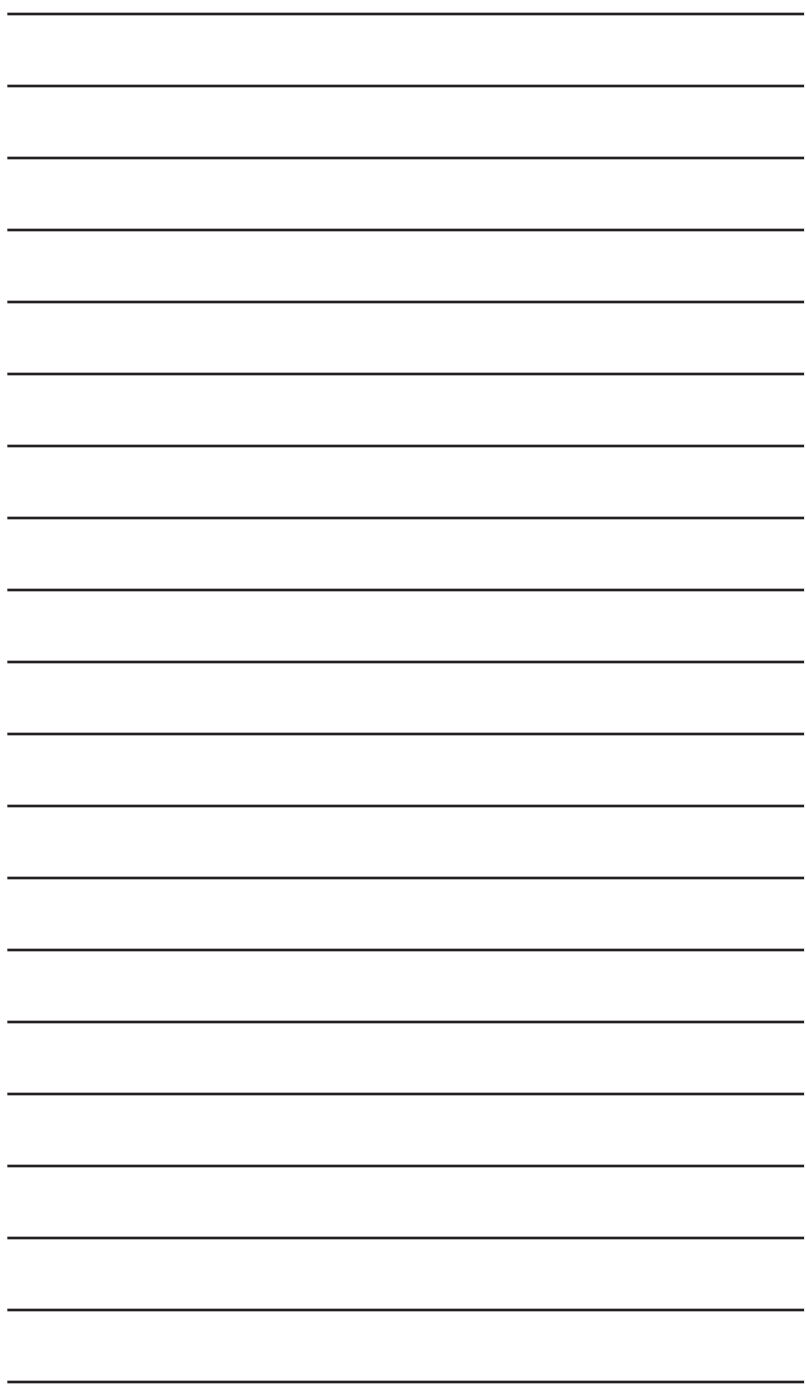
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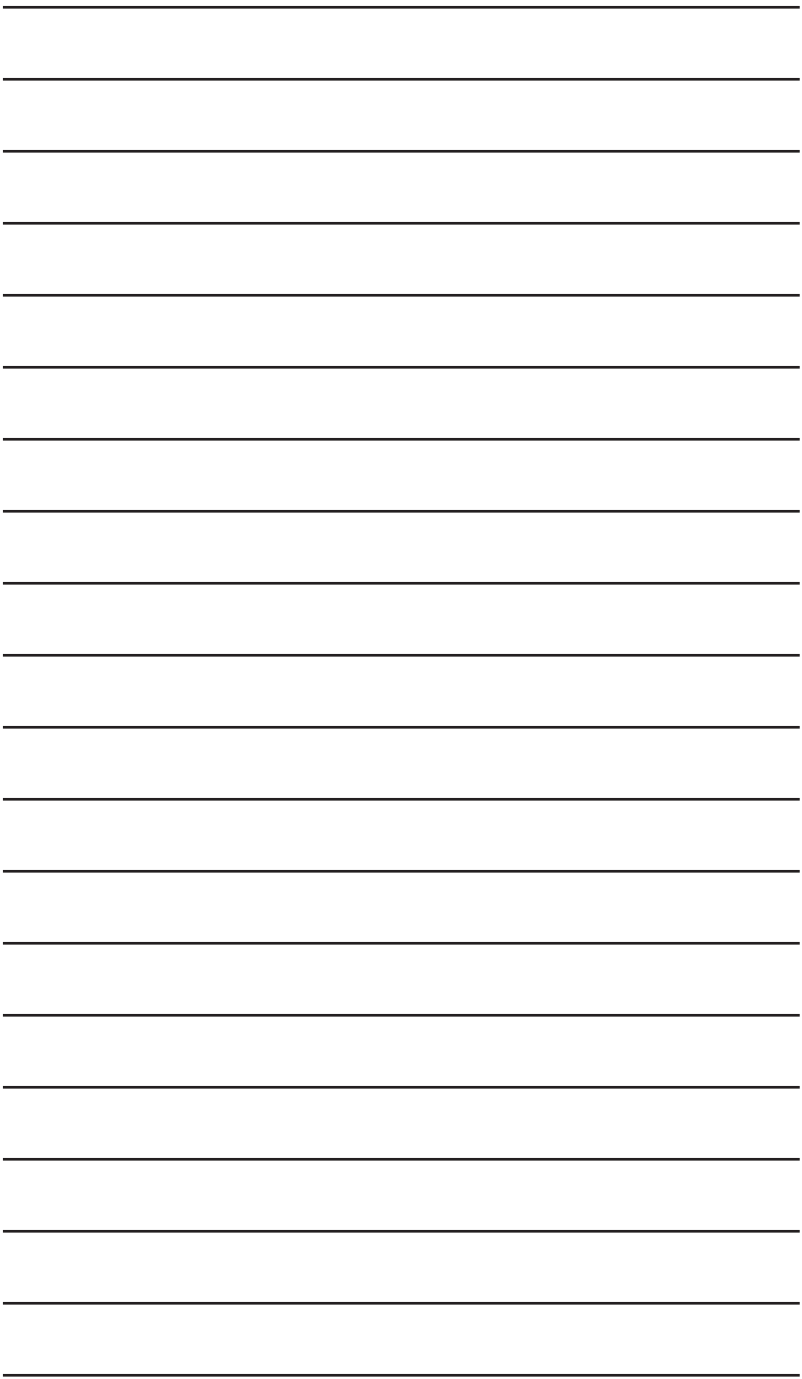
Both of these passages show people joyfully giving thanks to God for His power and faithfulness. What are some specific ways God has been at work in your life? This Lent, how can you cultivate a habit of thanksgiving, praising God not just in moments of joy but in every season?

Lord, help me to cultivate a heart of gratitude. Open my eyes to see Your blessings, both big and small, and remind me to give thanks in all circumstances. Fill me with joy as I praise You for Your goodness and faithfulness. Amen.









WEDNESDAYS DURING LENT

Vertical Habits: The Podcast

Dive deeper into our Lenten series with a special podcast featuring our clergy as they reflect on and discuss each week's habit—helping you strengthen your communication with God beyond Sunday worship. Found wherever you listen to podcasts.

APRIL 13-19

Stations of the Cross

This come-and-go opportunity for reflection is open on both campuses throughout Holy Week.

View reflections online at mdumc.org/stations.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

Holy Wednesday

TAIZE WORSHIP

7 PM | THE JOURNEY

-

A quiet service of prayer and song.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

Maundy Thursday

MAUNDY THURSDAY WORSHIP

7 PM | MAIN CAMPUS SANCTUARY

-

A service of communion remembering Christ's last supper with the disciples.

FRIDAY, APRIL 18

Good Friday

TENEBRAE WORSHIP

NOON | THE JOURNEY

7 PM | MAIN CAMPUS SANCTUARY

-

A quiet service of reflection.

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP

5:30 PM | MAIN CAMPUS SANCTUARY

-

The story of Good Friday told for kids.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12

EASTER EGGSTRAVAGANZA

9-10:30 AM

MAIN CAMPUS WEST LOT

-

Join us for this spring community event! Children's egg hunt for all ages, crafts, and more.

EASTER

at MDUMC

SUNDAY, APRIL 20

Sunrise Worship | 7 AM | Main Campus Front Lawn

8, 9:30 & 11 AM | Easter Worship at the Journey

9:30 & 11 AM | Easter Worship in the Sanctuary



MEMORIAL DRIVE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

mdumc.org