



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

May 14, 2017

"The Daily Examen" (How to Pray Sermon Series)

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The Bible says, "Don't despise the day of small things."

It's the little things that become quite big in one's life.

It's Mother's Day. A good mother nurtures. A good mother gives tips on how to live life better. A good mom wants to give us a legacy of wisdom that will stick with us for a long time.

Today please allow me to mother you a bit. I want to teach you about a discipline, a way of life that might dramatically change your life. It will help you seek the presence of God in all things.

It might give you strength in the midst of suffering, give you a closer relationship with God, propel you to always be optimistic in the face of disappointment. You might become more resilient, wise, strong, faithful, friendly, grateful, joyful, peaceful.

When you hear all that, you might be thinking, "Then bring it on! Who wouldn't want that?"

I'll give you the information shortly. But remember, for this discipline to work, you will need to apply it regularly to your everyday life. Actually, this discipline is not hard to do. It's simple. What might be hard is to remember to do it daily and often.

We are in a new series called, "How to Pray". If ever you want to know how to pray more effectively with a power and effect on your own life, then you are in the right place.

But before I let you in on the secret of living a new, empowered life, let me share with you the Bible passage for the morning as Michele, our scripture reader, comes on up.

It's from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church in the city of Philippi. Hence, the book is often called Philippians. Some people think it is for Filipinos, but no, it is the letter to the Philippians.

Here is the passage in the fourth chapter that has the power to be so revolutionary in our lives. And I warn you, when you first hear it, you will think it is too good to be true...too unattainable. Maybe for some, it's too idealistic, too "Pollyanna" but it is actually a way we can all live. Really.

Okay, here it is from the fourth chapter of Philippians. Please now stand in respect to God's word to hear Michele read the scripture verses for today.

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Phil. 4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Phil. 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Phil. 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil. 4:8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Phil. 4:9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Okay. Let's look at that passage again. Each slide is like dynamite, so powerful.

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Phil. 4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

When we hear this we might think, “REALLY? Is it possible that I could live a life of rejoicing... a lot of rejoicing in gladness? And can I live a life of gentleness to everyone?”

Then in the next verse we find, *“but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”* Can I be that thankful... many times a day?

And then the next verse.
Phil. 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Could I live a life of not worrying? Really?

And then the next verse.
Phil. 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Can I live a life of having a peace, a calm sturdiness, that passes all understanding? And on and on the power-packed passage presses forward...to the beautiful poetic part that yes it is possible.

Phil. 4:8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

It is possible to live a life where I’m consistently focused on:
*whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,*

*if there is any excellence
and if there is anything
worthy of praise...
think, think, think about
these things.*

And to all of this I say yes, it is possible...it is doable, not for the super Christian but for the average normal person.

Friends, we can live a life just like the passage I read, but first I need to mother you all a bit and share how we could live this way daily, steeped in the presence of God.

But before we can attain that kind of living, we have to seriously consider developing a simple, daily discipline that will free us to become the person we were meant to be in terms of love, making the right decisions and experiencing God—to be who we were designed to be.

It’s a discipline called, “The Daily Examen.”

It began with a man named Ignatius of Loyola of Spain who lived in the late 1400’s and mid 1500’s. Millions use this Daily Examen.

Many of you may not know St. Ignatius. Ignatius was not a godly man in his youth and young adulthood. He was a soldier, a real macho man who was vain, prideful and stubborn. But one day he got wounded in battle. A cannonball shattered his leg! And while in a long recovery, he fell into a depression.

But while in his sick bed he recommitted his life to Christ in a new way—to serve Christ as the saints of old.

He eventually began, with a small group of friends, a new

religious order which we today call the Society of Jesus, where centuries later, its members are known as the Jesuits. Pope Francis is a Jesuit, the first Jesuit to become a Pope.

Ignatius, whom the Catholics call St. Ignatius, came up with a spiritual discipline called The Daily Examen. You have a card in your bulletin that gives the bullet points of it to follow. I have modified it a bit and put it into an acronym so that you can remember it easily.

Before I explain to you how it works, I want to tell you that you are not doing the Daily Examen just for yourself. You’re not doing it for God to win bonus points, nor to be more successful. No, you are doing the Examen *WITH* God.

Not *FOR* Him but *WITH* Him—to experience His presence, to talk to Him and you then start to become the person you were meant to be. You do it with Him like a friend talking to another friend...like a child reading a book in their parent’s lap.

You can do the Examen sitting down, or lying down, walking your dog, or hanging out on the beach. You are talking to Him, pouring out your heart to Him, loving Him as a child to a loving parent, or tutu or tutu-kane.

You are doing the Examen not by yourself but *WITH* God. For it is all about experiencing God and in turn you will be stronger, wiser, more resilient and kind and loving.

The Daily Examen is about the Presence of God in your life. It is a brief time you set aside to daily examine and prayerfully reflect on the events of your day to say to God, “I saw You present in them.”

The Daily Examen is best if you do it twice a day...about midday and at night before you go to sleep. But it is not meant to be legalistic. You're doing it to develop a good habit.

Do it in the car as you drive, do it in the shower, do it when you're cooking, gardening, while waiting for your doctor or dental appointment. I like to do it just before I go to bed...reviewing the day.

As that immensely popular slogan goes, "Just do it!" And do it daily. Ideally, it was designed to do it mid-day and before you go to bed.

Basically there are just five things to do as you talk WITH God in The Daily Examen. And when we are doing it, we will see how it fits right into our reading of Philippians 4.

The first step in the Daily Examen is the step of Gratitude.

1. Give Thanks.

In this first step, recall anything from the day for which you are especially grateful, and give thanks to God for them. Just start listing them to God. Tell Him every little and big thing.

Ignatius would say "relish" or "savor" these occasions for gratitude. Savoring slows us down in a hectic, fast-paced life.

Anthony de Mello said, "You sanctify whatever you are grateful for."

For me this is the most powerful step. It is amazing when we continually look for things for which we are grateful. When we are forever grateful it changes our lives. We are strengthened. We

become more optimistic and pleasant to be with. We are more peaceful and patient.

How does this work? It is time for another travel story. As you may know, a few of the staff, Alpha leaders, and I just took a flight to London for a conference. The trip was paid for by a donor.

On the flight I was writing this sermon and I started to write down all of the things I was thankful for. You can see how recalling events of the day can get you into the practice of being thankful for every little detail.

Don't despise the day of small things. Hence, nothing is taken for granted. You will always be full of gratitude. Here is what I wrote down:

Lord, I am so thankful for the following:

- First, someone paid for all of the staff to go to London for the conference.
- Second, Pam and I got to the airport on time.
- Third, all of the people with whom we were traveling go there on time.
- Fourth, Lord, I am grateful that when I lost my passport after TSA inspected me, and after I searched and asked a TSA agent to help me find it, that we finally found that it had fallen behind a bench along the wall. Thank You that I saw the cord of my passport pouch barely revealed behind the bench so I could find it. I was worried I was going to miss a flight with a church group...again.

But that's another story, Lord.

- Fifth, I'm grateful that there was no flight delay. We took off on time.

- Sixth, I'm grateful that everyone got the aisle or window seat assignment they wanted. No one got re-accommodated.

- Seventh, I'm grateful that when we got to San Francisco, a nice United Airlines agent allowed all six of us to enter into the United Hospitality Room for free instead of having to pay \$65 each.

- Eighth, I'm grateful that there was delicious free food and tea in there.

- And Lord, ninth, I'm grateful that they had a really nice restroom.

Why did I write that? I went in there to wash my eyeglasses; spent some time at the sink in there taking my time washing and cleaning my lenses.

No one was in the bathroom, but when I came out a man stared at me in disbelief. It was then I realized I had walked into the women's restroom and not the men's. Thank You, Lord, that it was such a quiet, peaceful, time of solitude in there, cleaning my glasses....and so,

- Tenth, I'm grateful I didn't bump into a woman!

- Eleventh, on the flight leaving San Francisco for London, we all again had great seats and the seat in between Pam and me was open, so we had more room.

- Twelfth, Lord, thank You for airplane food. I had some great Butter Indian chicken.

- Thirteenth, thank You Lord for great flight attendants!

They were super friendly and helpful in both flights.

- Fourteenth, thank You that I don't feel tired and no one is sick.

And there, that was my list... without having even landed in London yet.

You can see there are many things to be thankful in just an eight-hour period, and we will see them if we are just alert. Try it tonight.

I think all of us can do the first part of the Daily Examen with no problem at all. Share our gratitude with God. If we really think about it, we could start listing things that we shouldn't take for granted and be grateful for instead.

What I listed is pretty pedestrian and normal...except for going into the ladies room. But even in that circumstance, I was thankful that it didn't get really bad. I lead such an exciting life!

So first step is just speak of your GRATITUDE to God of everything and thank Him.

Second step:

2. Review the Day.

In this step, recall the events of the day, from start to finish. Hit the rewind button from morning to evening, maybe hour by hour, noticing where you felt God's presence, and where you accepted or turned away from an opportunity to grow in love.

As you think about your day maybe it begins with, "Lord, early in the morning I took a walk and I just sensed You were there in the wind, or the rain or in the rainbow I saw.

When I went to work I felt you were there. There was that smile someone gave me, or the song on the radio.

And Lord, there were some opportunities when I could grow in love. I remembered Sally's birthday; I remembered that Bob's son was really sick and I could offer a bit of encouragement; I felt Your presence, Your prodding that I should do that.

I felt Your presence in the difficult staff meeting as I felt we had a chance to do something right for the community, something right for the employees.

But as I review each hour, Lord, I guess there were times when I turned away from an opportunity to grow in love. I could have offered some encouragement to John Doe, but he just irritates me. But then I am sure I irritate You, Lord. I could have been more patient with him as You are patient with me.

The presence of God can make us feel good or it can prick our conscience as we re-live each hour.

And then we go to the third step of the Daily Examen...when we are not at our best and most loving.

3. Apologize.

Recall any actions for which you are sorry. This is asking God for "the grace to know my sins." Where have I turned away from the best part of me that draws me to God, and instead was not loving, wise, understanding, patient?

Sorry for how we acted with the kids...with our friends...with our spouse...with our colleagues,

our neighbor...our parents...our siblings...our colleagues. Truly sorry. There needs to be a time in our prayers where we confess our turning away from love.

We live in a society where we think "guilt" is a bad word, but when our conscience says we were indeed guilty of a sin...let us not run from it but confess it for then how do we ever become remorseful and then grow?

Confession is like releasing the toxins from our soul. We need to be honest daily in confession. Confession is a lost spiritual discipline, I believe.

And this leads to the next important, critical fourth step.

4. Forgive.

The best way to release the toxins is not only to confess but to forgive someone or to ask for God's forgiveness. That is what truly cleanses us.

Decide whether you want to reconcile with anyone you have hurt. Decide what you can say or do if you want to reconcile. Ask for God's forgiveness for yourself and for others. Forgiveness is not forgetting but giving up the right to retaliate and trust God that He will take care of an offender—whether that is someone else or ourselves.

And then finally the last step, which is to:

5. Turn to God.

Turn to God for the grace you need for the next day and an ability to see God's presence more clearly.

Turn to Him for grace that we are not perfect and that we all try our best.

For grace that we are all a work in progress. For that kind of grace for ourselves as well as for others.

For grace that truly does allow us to see God's presence.

And that's the key. Can we pray to God in this way daily and therefore increase more and more God's presence in our lives—in our thinking, acting, listening, forgiving?

Turn to God to seek to be the person we were meant to be.

We need to graft the Daily Examen in our lives. Do The Examen daily. In fact, the word GRAFT is a simple acronym to help us remember The Daily Examen. Let's take a look at the card again.

The Dailey Examen
(Looking for the Presence of God)

Give Thanks

Review

Apologize

Forgive

Turn to God

To GRAFT something into another means—to join, insert, splice, implant. We want God's presence grafted into our lives.

Now knowing how the Daily Examen works...knowing how it emphasizes God's presence, and our immense gratitude to him, now let us read together out loud Philippians 4 with this spiritual discipline in mind. With the Daily Examen we can see these words are all possible.

Saying these verses together with me:

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Phil. 4:5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Phil. 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Phil. 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil. 4:8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, THINK about these things.

Phil. 4:9 KEEP ON doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

You see The Daily Examen all over and throughout that passage. It speaks of the possibility of living a life of rejoicing and not needing to worry. Why? Because it says:

Phil. 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

In everything there is prayer and requests with thanksgiving and then we can let our requests be known to God. But these are not requests of "make me healthier, more popular, more famous, more rich" but it's the requests of "Lord, help me grow in love; help me forgive more; help me see Your presence more."

And as we develop the discipline of examining our life to see instances of God's presence in them, then what happens?

We become rock solid in our faith and love for life. No matter what happens, whether we are in times of plenty or in times of need, we can be content.

And so in the next verses in Philippians after our passage we just read together, it says this about a new me I can be.

Phil. 4:11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. (The Daily Examen will help with that).

Phil. 4:12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

That's a famous verse, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." Most people read that and think, "Great I just believe in Jesus and then I can do all these things because God strengthens me." Well, that's part of it.

But what it is really saying is that when we are always thankful, when we are always asking for forgiveness for ourselves, when we can forgive others, when we see the presence of God...then we are in a state where I can do through Christ who strengthens me...for the presence of God is with me.

When we live a life of always seeing God, and forgiving and being thankful and sorrowful for our own wrong doing...then we are impenetrable and strong.

The last few years of ministry has been really hard.

As you know there have been challenges of finances, and challenges of members passing away, and challenges of other happenings that lead to tremendous stress. The only way I can cope for now and the future...the main way I feel God's presence... is when I daily go through *The Daily Examen*. It's my powerful new secret.

Even when there is pain in our lives, even when things don't go right, even when we face serious critics, even when a loved one dies—we can choose to live not a life of despair, but a strong life—when we can always be thankful for God, always looking for things to be thankful for, reviewing our days of working, seeing where we have done wrong, asking for forgiveness and then turning to God to ask for His grace.

This simple five-step Examen can really change our lives and increase an awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

So together, let us seek God's presence in a new way and receive this Mother's Day advice from a spiritual father, your shepherd.

And remember, DON'T DESPISE THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS. It's the Examen that can help us seek the presence of God in everything.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com