



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

Share

An Lent sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton in the The Walk Series
Delivered on April 03, 2022
on the following texts:

1 Peter 3:15-16 NRSV

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Matthew 5:16 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Preamble

Hi! I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor, thanks for joining in worship today as we wrap up our lenten series that focuses on the 5 core spiritual practices of United Methodists Christians. We've been using the book The Walk by Rev. Adam Hamilton as the foundation to this series.

	SEARCHING	EXPLORING	BEGINNING	GROWING	MATURING
WORSHIP & PRAYER 	Searching for something more, have prayed in a crisis or at a meal when led by others.	Attend worship on occasion. Have tried praying and talking with God on occasion.	Begin worshipping regularly. Pray for my own needs and the needs of others.	Attends weekend worship as much as my schedule allows and find ways to worship & pray during the week.	Attends worship weekly, find ways to worship every day, practice different forms of prayer or pray 'without ceasing'.
STUDY 	Curious about spiritual things, have big questions and are searching for answers.	I've done some reading, watched videos, picked up the Bible in search of answers.	I've committed to reading Scripture. Attend a study. Committed to going deeper.	Frequently read Scripture or other edifying literature, attend studies regularly.	Spend time daily reading and studying Scripture, willing to teach others formally or informally.
SERVE 	Notice the needs of others and the world and feel like you should help.	Have volunteered before or on occasion.	Find joy, gratitude and contentment in serving others on occasion.	Search out regular opportunities to volunteers and offer my gifts to better our world.	Offer yourself to God in service everyday. Service brings joy and deepens your relationship with God & neighbor.
GIVE 	Notice or experience the generosity of others and it stirs your heart or mind.	Feel good spontaneously donating to worthy causes when I feel moved to do so.	I like putting money in the offering at church. Same is true of other causes.	Intentionally set money aside to give to my church & other causes. Make an estimate of giving to my church.	Find joy living below my means so that I can give freely and abundantly & want to help others find the joy of giving.
SHARE 	Openly recommend something you find good or worthwhile to others who are interested.	Would be willing to talk about God, faith or church with a trusted person if they asked.	I would be willing to recommend my church to or discuss faith with an interested person.	I look for ways to share about my faith in thanksgiving for what God has done for me.	Find joy in sharing about my faith with others, inviting them to know God in Christ and to my church.
	PREVENIENT GRACE	→	JUSTIFYING GRACE	→	SANCTIFYING GRACE

Where he lays out the 5 practices. I am grateful for all the testimony we've heard from fellow UMCG'ers on the practices like: [Carol Zars](#), who shared about her worship and prayer practices; the first of the five practices. Remember we are trying to grow into the people who pray at least 5 times a day and praise God daily. I am grateful for [Bill Johnson](#) who shared how he came to be a practitioner of studying the Scriptures, our second core practice as we try to read at least 5 verse of scripture every day. [Jim Manos](#) shared about serving as the third core practice and how by serving within the church we can demonstrate love of God and serve beyond the walls of the church to love neighbor. His testimony reminds us that we can strive to offer the world 5 acts of kindness each week. Last week, [John Kemble and Pastor Lisa](#) shared about giving as the fourth core practice and how generosity with not only our money but all our lives is a response to the love of God for us as we give to extend a gods love to others, first through the church and beyond seeking to do so, five times a month.

I want to thank all those who interviewed for this series and invite you to check out our YouTube Chanel to see those interviews or head to our website to check out our past services archive to catch up if you missed it.

The final core spiritual practice in this series is sharing our faith. As you've heard, we've had a great set of people who have been showing us by example how to share and to continue in this trend, the [Wetmore family](#) is going to talk about sharing as a faith practice as I encourage us to invite people to church 5 times a year. Now these 5 practices aren't something we simply do in Lent. Lent is just the spring training, we continue to live into these 5 practices every day of the year and we will be focusing on them in our ministry as the practical outflow of our membership vows at UMCG.

Let's pause here for a moment of prayer to invite the Spirit to illumine our hearts and minds for the message. Please pray with me.

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus, you boldly and unapologetically love us. There is nothing we could ever do to make you love us less or for that sake make you love us more. Your love is such a wonderful gift. Help us to not take it for granted or to waste it by keeping your love to ourselves, but through the message today empower us to share your love and invite others to experience your love at UMCG. Amen

Sermon

This past week my family went out of town for Spring Break. We drove down and enjoyed a Gulf Shores vacation. On our vacation, we did the same thing we do every time we are in a new place and are hungry. I open Google Maps on my phone and search whatever sounds good or if we don't have something in mind we just search restaurants. Then I narrow the geographic area and filter out anything that isn't rated 4 stars or higher. From there I read the reviews of any place that sounds interesting or good and then we go there and we are usually not disappointed.

For example, last summer we were in the middle of nowhere Montana on our way to Glacier National Park. We pull into Whitehall, MT for our gas and lunch stop. There was plenty of fast-food options by the highway, but we used this same google review process and found the Pepper Tree Sandwich Shop and Deli. If you think Deanne's on Third Street is good, Pepper Tree in little rural Whitehall, Montana is far better. We had the best lunch of our three-week trip there. We would have never found that place if it wasn't for people sharing their opinions about the

place on google. Pepper Tree knew this too, encouraged people to write reviews, it helped grow their business about mile off the interstate exit.

Now, I haven't turned my message into a commercial or advertisement for restaurants and vacation spots. I just want to point out how much of our life is driven by reviews and recommendations of people, even relative strangers. We look to the experience of others to help us make informed decisions. We often trust and value the opinions of those we love or respect even more than strangers and use those to form our behaviors. We do this with shopping too, right? Many of us, don't buy a new product with reading the reviews first.

This review process is even true of our church: check out the reviews. On Google, UMCg has 3.8 out of 5 star review (*at the time of writing, after sermon it is 4.4 out of 5!*). Sadly, we are one of the lower ranked churches in Geneva. If I was new to town or visiting and was looking for a church, I'd open up Google and pick the highest rated churches and visit them first. UMCg wouldn't get a glance, unless there were other people sharing with me (on Google or in my neighborhood) about UMCg and what they love about the church.

Sharing and inviting are the primary ways people who are not yet here, get to learn about who we are as a church and this isn't just about church, sharing is also how people get to know who Jesus is too.

When the apostle Peter is writing to his churches he tells them "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you." Peter is telling us we need to be prepared to talk about Jesus and our church at any point, to anyone, including online.

I'll admit a lot of times, we have had the negative experience of faith sharing. Where we are told what we believe is wrong and what the person sharing believes is right. Or that we 'should' believe such and such. Negating the fact that Peter tells us that when giving an account of our faith we are to do so gentleness and reverence."

I want us to listen to Tom and Ali Wetmore as they serve as a positive example of how to speak about their faith and invite people to church without putting anyone out or down [CLICK TO WATCH](#).

As Tom and Ali mention, faithful sharing of our faith requires an openness to others. This can be a challenge, especially this day and age. But I like how they demonstrated that by making "I statement" and putting out there what works for them and how they know Jesus and invite others to share in that without pushing our beliefs or opinions on others. This tends to be the most effective and faithful way to share we can offer with gentleness and reverence.

So how can we be faithful in responding to God's call to share our faith and about how our faith is lived out in church?

First, we have to know what God is doing for us. Is it joy, is it peace, is it the assurance of eternal life? What can you pinpoint in your life as God's mighty work? If you were suffering something terrible and a doctor healed you, you'd have no problem telling people what that doctor did for you? Jesus has done so much for us, its worth sharing. In the same way our church, though imperfect, means something to each of us, or we wouldn't be here, and our church family and how we do church in the world is worth talking about and inviting people to share in the same experience of church.

I've been reading the gospel of Mark lately and every time Jesus does a healing miracle, he tells the person being healed to not say anything about him or the miracle to anyone and the first thing the person who is healed does is breaks the secret about Jesus. When Jesus touches your life and brings healing and wholeness its worth letting the whole world know. So second, we need to be able to speak for ourselves. Sharing of faith isn't about projecting our way of thinking on to others, but rather speak about what God has done for you and why you'd want someone else to have a similar experience of God.

Lastly, one way we can share is simply invite people to our church. Maybe you aren't the most eloquent speaker or are not quite sure yet how to articulate what God is doing in your life or what Jesus means for you. But you probably could write a five-star review for our church on Facebook, Google and/or YouTube. You could share a link to our social media posts. And you could certainly invite someone to come to church with you. Like I said at the beginning, invite some one to attend 5 times in a year. Note I said invite, they don't have to say yes and come with you for it to count (while that would be awesome) it often takes multiple gentle and humble invitations before someone says yes.

God blesses with such good gifts, a savior who died for us, a church to support and nurture us and the Holy Spirit to empower us on the spiritual walk - let us respond to these gifts in humble thanks by sharing what God has done, is doing and will continue to do with others. Amen.

Let us pray:

We know our loving acts of kindness and generosity in the world often point to your great love O God. Help us to know that you require more, to talk about you with others. First, give us the words to say. Second, give us the courage to say it. Third, show us the people that will hear and receive it. And finally, help us to glorify you in all things as we share your great love with others. Amen.