

Healthy, Holy Habits

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27 NRSV

Series: Ever Growing Faith, May 2025

There's a certain **cultural obsession** these days with habits and routines. We're inundated with tools to track our sleep, optimize our workouts, measure our productivity—and yes, **even systematize our spiritual lives**. And I'll admit—I **love a good system, like a lot**.

Many of you at Love First **know my reputation all too well**. I'm the one with the color-coded spreadsheet and calendar, the efficient workflow, the thought-out plan. I get way too excited about structure and strategy. And there is **just such a deep satisfaction** in checking things off a to-do list.

Maybe many of you relate, **we are Methodist after all!** And Methodists really do seem to have a method for everything...

But how really do we really apply this to our spiritual lives?

In our scripture today, Jesus tells us **something profound about foundations**. He says, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

Jesus **doesn't** say, "Everyone who memorizes these words *or really likes them...*" is wise. He proclaims **that true faith is shown** by the one who **hears** and **acts** on His words. This tells us that belief is not in itself all there is to faith.

Our faith isn't just something we think or feel—**it's something we do**. Our foundation is formed not by spiritual highs, but **by our embodied habits**.

And this is **where our holy, healthy habits enter**—not as spiritual performance tools, but as the **daily, grounding practices** that slowly, sometimes imperceptibly, transform us from hearers into doers.

Faith is rooted. It's Historic. Anchored in a God who has spoken the same truth across centuries of human frailty, and who **still meets us** in the pages of a very old text.

Stable, regular practices of seeking the divine help us **to be more attuned to the God who is already here**. Who was and always will be here: yesterday, today, and forever.

And that's **the revolutionary truth hiding in Jesus's simple metaphor about foundations**: faith is built on the ordinary, consistent decisions to act on what we've heard.

The habits we form **aren't just spiritual exercises**. They're the quiet architecture of endurance. They are **how our faith keeps growing**, in all of life's ups and downs. Just as Jesus describes the **difference between sand and rock**, our habits determine **whether we stand or fall** when life's storms come.

I want us to look closely **at just two holy habits today**: engaging with scripture and seeking silence. The habits themselves aren't the destination. **They're the scaffolding**—what holds us in place long enough for something **deeper to take root**.

In the Wesleyan tradition, **there is a tool known as the Quadrilateral**—which is scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Together these are the **key sources that shape our theology** and life of faith.

Scripture—this text we come back to—this library of poetry, law, and lament—is the source on which all of the other things rely. **Scripture is the foundation—the rock, not the sand**—upon which we build our understanding of our lived faith.

It has been weathered by centuries of human hands, copied in candlelight, whispered in hiding, preached in cathedrals and on dirt roads alike. It's not pristine. It's not sterile. **And yet it still speaks.**

Sometimes it roars. Sometimes it whispers. Sometimes, if we're honest, it confuses us or offends us. But with time—when we dwell with it long enough **and with curiosity**—it begins **to read us** as much as we read it.

Thomas Merton once wrote that prayer is **"rainfall absorbed by soil."** It disappears. It doesn't bloom immediately. But in time, it nourishes hidden roots. **And I think scripture works like that too.** We don't always see the fruit right away. But it's there—sinking in, anchoring us, becoming something deeper than information. **It becomes our transformation.**

So, we are encouraged **over and over to return to the text**—not to master it, but to be shaped by it. Not to conquer it, but to be companioned by it. And of course, to do it! How can we be expected to live these words of Jesus without knowing what they really are?

We return not because we understand everything scripture says, but because, over time, **we realize it's speaking to the truest parts of who we are—and who we're becoming.**

And that brings us now to the **second practice, the discipline of seeking silence.**

If faith grows slowly and deeply, then silence is often **the soil where it takes root.**

When life is hard and overwhelming, I've learned not to chase more stimulation or try to force a spiritual feeling. Instead, at my wisest moments, **I lean into stillness.**

I retreat, when I can, to places like St. Ben's Monastery, where the rhythm of prayer shapes the day like breathing. There's no accomplishment to be

found there on those intentional days. Just silence, presence, and prayerful repetition.

In that space, I can hear again—not just God, but also the quiet parts of myself I've ignored or rushed past.

Here at Love First, we're blessed with our beautiful prairie land and labyrinth—**sacred spaces designed for seeking silence and presence.** I've seen many of you walking those paths, finding moments of holy stillness even in brief visits.

But what about those crazy moments of the week when we can't get away? When the kids are screaming, the inbox is overflowing, and there's no prairie in sight? Silence can be found even then—in the car with the radio off, in five deep breaths before a difficult meeting, in a moment of gratitude before a meal. **The foundation of rock that Jesus speaks of can be built in these small, intentional pauses too.**

And I believe there's wisdom in the stillness. Not answers, necessarily, but something truer: alignment. Grounding. The re-centering of our souls.

The composer, Claude Debussy, once said that music is **"the silence between the notes."** That image resonates deeply with me. In faith, too, it's often the pauses—the spaces between doing—where the Spirit works. Where what we've been practicing **has time to settle in** and become part of us.

That kind of transformation doesn't happen all at once. It happens **the way a garden grows**—quietly, beneath the surface, nurtured by things that seem invisible or unremarkable. A daily prayer. A moment of stillness. A passage of scripture that lands quietly but sticks.

Faith, in this sense, is less like performance and **more like cultivation.**

I think here of **Bishop Sally Dyck's work**. Our series this season is based loosely on her book "A Faithful Heart". In it, she describes **a spiritual pyramid**. I've recreated one that fits our spiritual context for us to look at together today.

At the base are **the everyday practices** that give shape to a faithful life: prayer, meditation, Bible study, loving others in our community.

Next, weekly we are sustained by our time in worship together. Serving others, maintaining our healthy relationships through hard conversations, Support groups and book studies.

These are the wide, sturdy layers—**the parts we return to again and again**, not because they're flashy or new, but because they keep us grounded.

Above those are the things that might come less frequently but still deeply matter—retreats, conferences, spiritual direction, mountaintop moments. They're beautiful and energizing, but we can't live on the mountaintop. **We return home.**

And it's the base of the pyramid that sustains us in between those extraordinary moments.

But here's what I want to say clearly: our faith journeys cannot be reduced to a mere checklist. There isn't a system for earning spiritual gold stars or holy reprimands when we talk about spiritual habits.

Because some days? You'll miss the prayer time. You'll fall asleep halfway through reading a Bible passage. **And that's okay.** The power isn't in flawless execution. It's in **returning**—with grace.

Our spiritual habits **are not about** proving our faithfulness to God. They are about **reminding ourselves that God is already faithful to us.**

I hope this Eastertide season invites you to **try something new**. Or try something over **again**. But do it with softness. With compassion. Let us be the first to offer ourselves grace when the rhythm falters.

Here are a few invitations—*not instructions*—just gentle suggestions to explore what **practicing holy habits** could look like in your daily life:

- Maybe you **write in a journal** a few times a week—not to track your holiness, but to notice where God is showing up.
- Maybe you **pray through one Psalm** each morning—not to master the Bible, but to let the words settle into you like morning light.
- Maybe you **take five minutes of silence** before checking your phone—not because you have to, but because your soul might need space before the noise of the day begins.
- Maybe you **listen to scripture or a thoughtful podcast** while folding laundry or commuting—because faith can meet you right in the ordinary rhythms of daily life.

The goal isn't consistency for its own sake. The goal is openness. Surrender. **Letting these habits be places of encounter**—not obligation.

And when you miss a day—or a week or a season—**you are still held**. You are still beloved. And you can always **begin again**.

Love First UMC, by evidence of our work, **I would call us a church built on rock**. You have heard us talking a lot lately about our current visioning work, **but this isn't new territory for us**. We've been here before—over a decade ago, many of you discerned and planned **the move from downtown to here**. Then you journeyed through the **MCCI process** developing clear goals that have shaped the current culture of this church we love. We worked *hard* as we pursued the vision that led to becoming a **Trauma Responsive Church**; and even during our **COVID journey**, which required sudden visioning and shifting almost overnight.

Now we're leaning into our **current** strategic planning, **asking profound questions such as:** Who do we want to be in the future? What big, audacious dreams do we need to name and surrender to God?

These questions and this work **is rooted in God and in us, as God's people.** The holy habits we **each** cultivate—our individual prayer lives, our personal study, our commitment to serving—these don't just strengthen us as individuals. **They strengthen our entire church body.**

When I show up authentically and you show up authentically, we create **a community capable** of dreaming bigger dreams about how we share God's love in our community and beyond.

And the wonderful news is: **perfection isn't required of any of us.** What matters is that we keep showing up to the work. We keep listening. We keep being brave. We keep returning to the foundation we're laying right now—**together.**

We are not alone. The Spirit that began this work in each of us will carry it forward. The God who has walked with us through every past season will walk with us still.

What we're doing now—these healthy holy habits, these faithful visioning conversations—they don't just sustain us; **they remake us** into the church God is **calling us to become.**

Our foundation matters. And together, on this rock, we will continue **to grow, to serve, and to put love first in all things.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.