Moses Project Spiritual Practices Fall 2021

**Gratitude**

One of the simplest prayers we can offer is “Thank you.” And yet this prayer can be transformative! By nature, human beings tend to take notice of and hold onto the negatives in our lives more easily than we do what is good. Gratitude is a simple practice that invites us to take notice of the blessings in our lives each day and to recognize God’s presence there. This doesn’t mean that we have to ignore the painful or difficult situations in our lives; it’s simply an opportunity to recognize what else is there alongside those challenges or heartaches.

There’s no wrong way to practice gratitude. It might be as simple as noticing and offering a quick prayer of thanks for a kind gesture from a stranger or a friend, acknowledging how meaningful it feels to support another, or enjoying snuggles with a child or a pet. Or you might try this practice, adapted from *The Self-Compassion Workbook*, by Kristin Neff and Chris Germer. Begin by writing down five big things for which you feel grateful. These are the things we often think of, like family or friends, work, home, or health. Then write down five small, insignificant things for which you are grateful. These are the things we easily overlook, like the smell of clean sheets, a favorite pen, or a small act of kindness. Once you’ve completed your list, take a moment to notice how it feels to give space to gratitude. Pay attention to other emotions or how gratitude feels in your body. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the big and small things!

In a Group: Invite those present to make their gratitude lists and then share them as a group. Invite reflection on how it feels to celebrate these blessings—both big and small—together. Consider how this intention to recognize blessings might influence awareness of God’s presence. If the group will meet again, challenge participants to keep a gratitude journal and share how this practice impacts their spirit over time.

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Andrea Severson is a licensed mental health counselor and spiritual director. Her degrees include a Master of Science in counseling from Drake University and a Master of Divinity from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. She holds a certificate in spiritual direction and is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Andrea enjoys hearing the unique stories of the individuals and couples with whom she works.  Her areas of interest include anxiety, depression, trauma, identity, faith and spirituality, life transitions, and relationships.  Andrea is a member of the American Mental Health Counselors Association and Spiritual Directors International. In her spare time, she likes reading historical fiction, listening to the Beatles and camping.