



Spiritual Practices that Cultivate Safe Harbor Churches

Christ-centric Habits: Love God

1. Practice of Gratitude

Gratitude is an act of worship. It fosters humility, joy, love, and hope when we can thank God and others for the goodness we experience in all circumstances. Gratitude realigns our hearts to be open to God and others with expectancy, curiosity, and love. Express your gratitude daily. Use a gratitude journal. Post a board in your church for people to express praise and gratitude. Share good news with your cross-cultural worker through a monthly church letter update. Make space in your worship service to notice where God is present and faithful. Gratitude keeps our hearts, minds, bodies, and faith centered on Christ.

2. Prayer

Ephesians 6: 18 invites us to pray in the Spirit on all occasions; it is essential to the Kingdom coming. Pray with our eyes open and for our brothers and sisters always. **There are many ways to pray:** intercession, contemplative prayer, imaginative prayer, meditating with scripture, silence, journaling, the Lord's prayer, liturgical prayer, breath prayer, prayer walking, centering prayer, retreats, art prayer, Lectio and Visio Divina, daily office, praying with scripture, and more. Find the means of prayer that leads you deeper into Jesus and let it transform you. (Ephesians 3: 14-21) To explore ways to pray, explore my website, or reach out @ learnbyparadox@gmail.com.

Other-centric Habits: Love Others

3. Fidelity & Commitment

We are covenant, promise-keeping people. We are to be faithful, dependable, and trustworthy persons for our cross-cultural workers. Do they feel they can confidently reach out to you in an SOS situation? Are you a safe harbor in times of need and joy? Are you committed to investing in their spiritual, emotional, and physical Shalom? Are you faithful to the commitments you've made, or have you broken trust? This habit takes work, just like a marriage. It's easy to forget about our missionaries when they aren't with us each week. Just because we don't see them doesn't mean they don't need us to be committed. What touch points can you make to ensure that you are regularly

communicating, listening and responding to their needs. Where are you showing up for them while on the field?

4. Confession, Repentance, Reconciliation

Healthy churches faithfully practice confession, repentance, and reconciliation as a corporate body regularly. This is fundamental to being a community of peace as it keeps us in right relationship with God and others. If this is not a regular practice in your church, how can you incorporate it into the health and life of your church?

Does your pastor offer confession? Where in your weekly church service is there space for confession, repentance, or reconciliation? Various prayers of confession can be incorporated into a church service as a corporate prayer. Can you envision ways to incorporate this sacrament into the yearly life of your church? Consider the season of Lent as a time to offer this practice. The Prayer of Examen is a tool that fosters a reflective spirit of noticing, naming, and repenting to reconcile. Check out this [Examen](#) provided by Global Trellis or this traditional Examen.

Where can a missionary come to confess during home assignment and receive forgiveness and healing? I'd be happy to discuss with your church ways to incorporate these practices into a special service, an annual offering, or listening group for your church and missionaries.

5. Hospitality & Generosity

Jesus invites us to a gracious table full of hospitality. Does your community open itself to cross-cultural workers when they need respite, forgiveness, and care? What about the marginalized, poor, sick, and weary? Do you withhold the goodness God has given you, or do you give generously without concern? Hospitality is more than having dinner guests; it listens, sees, is curious, open, serves, is warm, and tender. It makes people feel welcomed, safe, and loved so they can be themselves and receive what they need.

Consider how Jesus was hospitable and generous. Look at the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet (Luke 7: 36-50). Remember the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12), Jesus feeding the five thousand (Matthew 14: 13-21), and the Last Supper (John 13: 1-38). What do you notice about Jesus' hospitality and generosity? How can you implement this into your church's habits, into the care you provide for missionaries or newcomers?

6. Attentiveness & Awareness of God, self, and others

Jesus often talks about waiting, watching, praying, and having eyes to see and ears to hear. He invites us to **live awake**. If we are focused only on ourselves, our worries, struggles, and successes, and are too busy for others and God, then we can't see where God is present, who we are in Christ, and how he wants us to love others. This is one of the hardest areas to cultivate because it is a life-long process and means we must die to ourselves.

If we cultivate an attentiveness to God's presence in our lives, he shows us who we are and how he desires to partner with us in the care of others. How are you attending to your relationship with God? How do you listen? How do you see?

Again, consider the Prayer of Examen, or see a spiritual director, or start group spiritual direction in your church. When you are well with God, you can cultivate that within the wider body.

Further Reading to explore who we are in Christ and how to Live Awake:

These books would make excellent group study companions.

- The Gift of Being Yourself by David Benner
- Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation by Ruth Haley Barton
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- The Anatomy of the Soul by Curt Thompson
- You are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit by James K.A. Smith
- What's your Decision? by Fr. J. Michael Sparough SJ