



THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

THE WAY OF LOVE

with Bishop Michael Curry

Season 2, Episode 7: Praying with Our Bodies and Our Creativity

Bishop Curry: This is Bishop Michael Curry and you're listening to *The Way of Love*. In this episode, we're talking about the practice we call "Pray" – dwell intentionally with God each day.

[music]

Kyle Oliver: Welcome back to *The Way of Love*, a podcast from The Episcopal Church about following Jesus and changing the world. In season two, we're talking about the Way of Love beyond the church walls. I'm Kyle Oliver and I'm here with Sandy Milien.

Sandy Milien: Thanks, Kyle. This is our episode about some less traditional practices of prayer. Our guest in the second half of this show will be Roger Hutchison, author of *The Painting Table*, as well as a new children's book about the Way of Love.

Kyle: First, we'll hear about prayer from another perspective. Let's let Bishop Curry's guest introduce herself and then he'll kick off their conversation.

Andrea McKellar: I'm Andrea McKellar. I'm the Ministry Developer for the Episcopal Church in South Carolina and a member of the Executive Council.

Bishop Curry: I've known Andrea off and on over the years for quite a while. I've actually seen you at work and in a variety of contexts and capacities. You do look like a centered person normally.

Andrea: [laughs]

Bishop Curry: Actually, some people just have that--

Andrea: I have my moments.

Bishop Curry: That's right. [laughter] Yes, sure. Imagine that I'm not Presiding Bishop, I'm just Mike Curry off the street. I know if I go in church, I'm supposed to have an experience of God or at least know I'm in a house of God or something like that, but is it really possible? If so, how can you actually be in touch with the sacred, with God, with the holy, with the extraordinary in some way that's not crazy?

Andrea: I've worked for the Church for almost 10 years. When you work for a church, sometimes Sunday isn't your sabbath time.

[laughter]

Bishop Curry: Yes. I would agree with that.

Andrea: I had to really work to figure that out. I had small children when I went into that, and so I had to figure out a time that I could have my own centering prayer. What I found was that I could get up early, and while my kids were still asleep and my husband was home with them, I could go for walks. That's really become my time. I do it when I travel. If I'm somewhere like Kanuga, I get to get up and do hikes in the morning and--

Bishop Curry: Now, Kanuga is up-- Where's Kanuga?

Andrea: Kanuga is a conference center in North Carolina.

Bishop Curry: Okay.

Andrea: It's in the mountains. I love getting to go to the top of the mountain and do morning prayer there or if I'm in a city, I love walking around and seeing the city wake up. Those things you wouldn't see at the same time at noon. Chicago's a great one, I love watching Chicago wake up. You can walk to the lake and all the things that are going on there, but at home, I just walk in the neighborhood. I listen to different podcasts a lot. "Pray as You Go" is an app I love doing in the morning.

Bishop Curry: "Pray as You Go" is that the name of the app?

Andrea: "Pray as You Go", yes. They'll do a little a reading for the day, a little reflection, some music. That's one way I found that I could have some quiet time to prepare myself for the craziness that is the rest of my life.

Bishop Curry: You actually do use aids, if you will, like "Pray as You Go", your app on your phone-

Andrea: Yes.

Bishop Curry: -and that kind of stuff. Do you ever talk to anybody when you're here?

Andrea: [laughs] I have. Sometimes, I will. If I'm traveling for a conference or something and someone really wants to go, I'll take them with me, but that's really my quiet time.

Bishop Curry: This is your quiet time.

Andrea: I'm an introvert and when you're a mom, you have someone next to you all the time, so it's pretty much the only time I'm by myself each day. I really enjoy having that.

Bishop Curry: Can I ask you? What do you do? How do you--? I'm curious, what do you do?

Andrea: Sometimes, it's just as simple as walking. I just go through the list of people I pray for in my head as I walk, specifically thinking as I take those steps. I have another app called "Ceaseless Prayer". It sends three names to me each morning. Those are people I add. Today actually, one of the presiding bishop's staff was one of the people that popped up for me to pray for today. It's great because it adds three people that might not necessarily be people you think of, but sometimes it's Delta, which I've decided they probably need--

Bishop Curry: Delta? As in the airline-

Andrea: Yes, because they're in my--

Bishop Curry: or as in the Mississippi?

[laughter]

Andrea: The airline, because it's in my phone list. I've decided that Delta needs prayer too. I pray for whatever comes up.

Bishop Curry: The "Ceaseless Prayer" app will actually take your contact list and just go-

Andrea: It just picks freely.

Bishop Curry: -creates a prayer list?

Andrea: Yes.

Bishop Curry: You ever do nothing?

Andrea: Sometimes.

Bishop Curry: What's that like?

Andrea: My brain's always going. [laughs]

Bishop Curry: Is that really prayer time?

Andrea: For me, it is.

Bishop Curry: It really is.

Andrea: Yes.

Bishop Curry: Why would you call it prayer?

Andrea: Because it is time where I feel connected to God. It's time where I have stripped away all the distractions. Sometimes, it's just a conversation with God. The other day, it was interesting, I had music on. I was listening to the Moana soundtrack. I was saying, "Thank you, God for different things," and the song, "You're Welcome" came on right then. It was like God was saying back to me, "You're welcome," right as I was saying, "Thank you for this day." It was so powerful with just the Moana soundtrack.

Bishop Curry: It's incredible.

Andrea: It felt like a conversation with God. It was a holy moment.

Bishop Curry: What I hear you saying is, actually, this is helpful to me, the intention of just spending time is like the psalmist in Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God." It's just chill. Just chill and know I'm God.

Andrea: That's where I feel most connected.

Bishop Curry: Wow. That's pretty awesome.

Andrea: Yes, it's good.

Bishop Curry: Anybody can do that.

Andrea: Yes.

Bishop Curry: It doesn't cost a penny.

Andrea: No. Just take the time.

Bishop Curry: Just take the time.

Sandy: Where and when do you feel most connected with God? Is there a place in your life or a particular time of day you could more regularly commit to a form of prayer that feels natural to you?

[music]

Kyle: We've heard a bit about walking and using apps to pray, and now we're going to talk about prayer and creativity. Sandy?

Sandy: In today's episode, we have with us Roger Hutchison. Roger, welcome. If you could introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about who you are.

Roger Hutchison: Sure. I'm the Director of Christian Formation and Parish Life at Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas. I'm an artist, a writer. I've been involved in Christian formation as a lay leader since I was 17 years old. I'm now 46 years old, so I've been in it a long time. I have discovered this passion almost by accident of working with art, using art to help folks tell their story, to navigate grief in a creative way, to pray in a different way than with words, using color.

Sandy: One of those books is *The Painting Table*. How did this book come to be?

Roger: When I was young, my favorite place, I guess my earliest memory of church was around my grandmother's kitchen table. This is where we held hands, it's where we prayed together, it's where we broke bread and shared a delicious meal. We were all welcome at that table. When she passed away, the only thing that I really wanted was her kitchen table, and so it came to live in my house, and we put it in a guest bedroom. That is where I found myself painting, or writing, or paying the occasional bill.

One night, while I was painting at the table, I was frustrated with what was going on. I took the paintbrush, threw it in the trashcan, and put my fingers directly into the paint, and began to paint in a way that was transformative. Hours passed before I realized what had happened. For me, that was really my first experience I think of the Holy, of God, of prayer, and in a way that I had never experienced.

Kyle: What do you think it was about the difference between using the brush and using your hands?

Roger: The goal often with a brush is to find perfection, to create something specific. For me, it was that, I don't know, it was almost as if I stuck my hands directly into as Thomas reaching his hands right in and having to feel directly the wound. Then for me, that is how painting is. I don't use brushes, I paint with my fingers now. Really, it's because the painting becomes prayerful. I enter into it, the colors move, and I never know what I'm going to paint.

Kyle: Are there other connections that seem relevant to you between creativity and prayer?

Roger: For me, art and faith are deeply tied together. There's not one without the other. Creating art, or creating music, or writing a poem as prayer comes out of a hunger and desire for beauty, truth, honesty, justice. I believe that's the same reason we are people of faith. God is in the beautiful and the ugly, the joy and the pain. It's through creation and appreciation of art that I personally have seen the face of God.

I love the whole idea of breaking open the idea of prayer and seeing it in a different light because so much is us talking and much less listening. When I'm doing the art piece, I can't put my fingers on my iPhone because it's covered in paint. I can't be distracted. For me, I enter into that and it becomes a very holy place.

Kyle: Roger, could you tell the listeners a little bit about what's in the book-

Roger: Sure.

Kyle: -without giving it away, and what you're hoping they would take away from the experience?

Roger: It's really actually a very simple little book. It's very small. It just tells basically the story that I just shared with you. Then in the back of the book, it has a journal where the reader is invited to do their own storytelling, to do their own journaling. The pages are large and blank, and you can draw, or paint, or whatever you want to do on those pages. At the top of those pages, there are guiding words that lead you through things such as fear, or worry, or joy, or a variety of different things. Then there are these quotes or Bible verses, things that just give you a little bit of guidance as you begin to use that.

For some reason, I have been recognized for grief work. I'm not a grief expert, but this book came out at a very powerful time in our world, right around the time that the shootings took place in Newtown, Connecticut at Sandy Hook Elementary. *The Painting Table* has a connection to Sandy Hook. That is, I believe, why grief at that point became what I now do.

Kyle: Can you say more about that connection, Roger?

Roger: I received a phone call and asked if I would come to Newtown, Connecticut, to Trinity Episcopal Church in Newtown and paint with the children of that congregation. In the midst of that congregation, they lost one of their children in that shooting. It was a congregation that was hurting, and it was a congregation that was trying to figure out—of course, the adults didn't know what to say. They just needed a space to pray, and create, and share, and tell their stories.

I remember I was very teary. I couldn't imagine that I had anything to offer to this group. I had never experienced, of course, anything like that. To enter that space for me was one of the most powerful things I've ever been a part of, and truly changed me at a cellular level. They were expecting 12, it was on a Friday evening, we ended up with about 60 people present.

Kyle: Wow.

Roger: In that room, there were children, parents, as well as their Sunday School teachers. Some of these children were in the hallway in the space where the shooting took place. I didn't do a lot of talking but I provided a space. There was a candle on each table, there were art supplies in the center of the tables. I opened it by just saying I was glad and honored to be in the space with them, and that I wanted to invite them to begin to create and to paint. It was just a really powerful moment, the rhythm in that space was incredible.

[music]

Sandy: You have a new book coming out in January, and it's called *The Very Best Day: The Way of Love for Children*. Can you tell us a little bit about this new project and why is it geared towards children specifically?

Roger: Sometimes we work to say too much, and a book like a children's book, so much can be said with so few words and with colorful images. That's what I wanted to do. Really, the goal is to introduce these practices for Jesus-centered life for children, and it's written really for ages 3 through 10 and their families, and through accessible language and age-appropriate themes.

It really addresses children and the importance of rhythm and practice in their lives as Christians. The earlier we can do this, and teach this, and model this, and live this with our children, the healthier, and stronger, and happier, and wholly in the sense of WH and holy, just H, their lives will be. Meditation and breathing, I speak of that in the book. There are all kinds of things that I think that we miss out with our children.

Kyle: What do you have to say about prayer in the new book?

Roger: I'm happy to share a little reading, if I may. This is just a little segment of the piece about prayer. "When thankful or afraid, I say a prayer. I know in my heart that Jesus is there. With hands

raised high or down on my knees, I cry out, and he calms the rough seas. Sometimes I hurt and want to hide. I'm not alone, he's by my side. Jesus always loves me and shows me the way. This has been an emotional day. At a table, his friends were gathered there, with gentleness and love, he taught them this prayer." Then I share the Lord's Prayer.

Sandy: That was beautiful.

Kyle: Thank you for that.

Roger: Thank you.

Sandy: Thanks for joining us today. This episode was produced by Kyle Oliver and me Sandy Milien. It was edited by Kyle. Our theme and reflection music are by Ana Hernandez. Jerusalem Greer writes our reflection guides. Chris Sikkema writes our shownotes. Our website is by Kaleb Heitzman, and you can check it out at wayoflove.episcopalchurch.org. You can learn more about Roger and find links to his work at rogerhutchison.org.

Kyle: You can subscribe to this show wherever you get your podcasts, and we'd especially love it if you rate and review it or share it with a friend. If you'd like to contribute music, a prayer, or feedback write us at wayoflove@episcopalchurch.org.

Wendy Claire Barrie: This is Wendy Claire Barrie from Brooklyn, New York. Holy One, quiet our minds and open our hearts, that we might learn to pray with and without words, in action and in art, with our bodies and with our imaginations, knowing that our intentions, lifted in love, will rise to meet your great love. Amen.

Bishop Curry: The way of Jesus is the Way of Love and the Way of Love can change the world.