



## Kevin's Korner

Last Sunday morning my sermon spoke of how prayer and praise in worship serve as ways to practice living in God's kingdom. We learned from Jesus in his life and teachings, particularly in the Beatitudes shared in his Sermon on the Mount, that we can live in relationship with God, like Jesus did, right now in our everyday lives. Jesus called this way of living in relationship with God, living in the "kingdom of heaven." And we can practice this relationship with God through our worship practices every Sunday morning. One might say, we are what we practice.

We think more about practicing when we want to learn a new sport or activity that we really want to get good at. At Guitar Club, I rarely miss a week reminding people about the power of practicing. I talk a lot about muscle memory, which happens when we repeat a muscular motion over and over until we get good at it. But, there is more to it. Scientists have learned that even in our old age, our brains grow new tendrils in response to repeated practice. And they are coming to an understanding that these tendrils create a connection between our brain and our muscles, which really can't be separated. They become one as the brain and muscles work together. The nerves and muscles actually merge together to swing a golf club, throw a ball, strum a guitar, stitch a cross-stitch pattern, and a million other activities that our bodies and brains practice together.

So, it makes sense that practicing worship and praise can also merge our brains, our muscles and even our spirits (mysteriously), where these practices actually become part of who we are in our daily lives. On Sunday, I was particularly talking about prayer practices, which make prayer, or connecting with God, a part of our lives, even our everyday lives.

This science finds a similar correlation, theologically and practically, as the Apostle Paul writes of the practice of giving to others leading to a growing virtue of generosity. It seems that the action of practice leads to an attitude or virtue of generosity, which, in turn, leads to the further action of a lifestyle of generosity.

More of the same can be said about gratitude, which leads to practices of worship, praise, service and giving, which, in turn, lead to a growing sense of gratitude. When you think about that, you can imagine it snowballing into true joy and peace in one's life. There don't seem to be many drawbacks to any of these practices mentioned, which all find at their source a recognition of God's preeminent grace in our lives.

With all this in mind, I hope you will consider Riecke Claussen's explanation about receiving "estimates of giving" statements this year, rather than asking for a "pledge" to the church. As Riecke said, a pledge insinuates an obligation or a contract of sorts, where an "estimate of giving" recognizes that every contribution to the church is really a gift to the church and to God. This opens the door to a growing practice of giving and generosity, which just might lead to a greater sense of gratitude for all that God has given to us first.

I don't know about you. But this discussion makes me look forward to this coming season of giving and generosity. I'm reminded how grateful I am to God, who always gives first!

God bless you!

Pastor Kevin