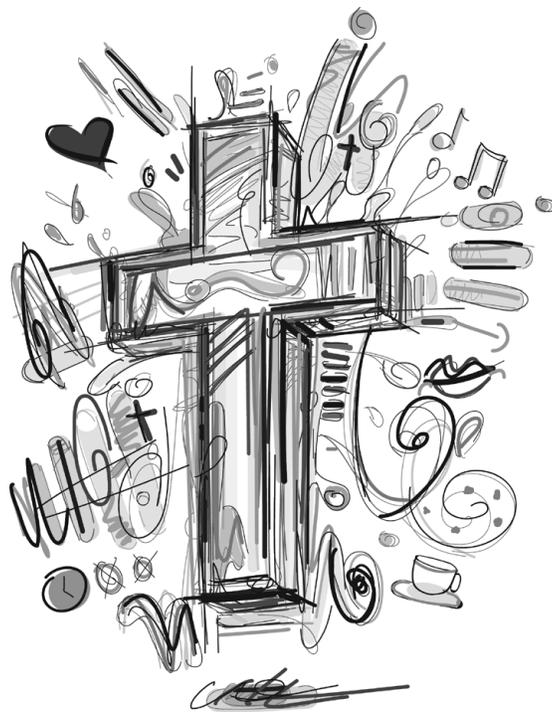


“We in the church have been too quick and too comfortable drawing lines between the sacred and secular, between the holy and profane. In this gem of a book, James Hazelwood invites us to blur those lines and to see all of life as a spiritual practice, a sacred journey, holy ground. This book will refresh your perspective on your daily work, your relationships, yourself, and your world.”

– THE REV. KEITH ANDERSON,
author of *The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World*,
and pastor of Upper Dublin Lutheran Church in Ambler, Pennsylvania



EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY



Discover a Life of Hope,
Peace and Meaning

JAMES HAZELWOOD

EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY

Discover a Life of Hope, Peace and Meaning

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Dedication

For Lisa

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Preface

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We have a long history in western culture of dividing the secular and the sacred into two separate, distinct categories. That divide has its origin in something called dualism, which most likely started with the Greeks. But, before the Greeks divided the world, the Hebrew people had a much more integrated way of understanding life, which is that all creation is bathed in the sacred. This book is an attempt to reclaim that way of thinking, which, by the way, is found in many other cultures, traditions, and religions around the world. I'm also making the case that this integrated or holistic approach is at the heart of Christianity too; we just drifted away from it.

An early reader of this book commented, "It's a Christian book, but it's more than that." I think what they were trying to say is that while this book is rooted in my faith as a progressive Lutheran Christian, it's a broad and open expression of the movement of Jesus. If your image of Christianity comes from TV news, politicians, or myopic social media news feeds, you might think that the religion of Jesus is full of rightwing

politics, harsh judgementalism, and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes. This book shows the other side: Hope, Love, Joy, Grace, Peace, yet honest real-life struggles and hurts, all together in a faith that is both honest and beautiful. I hope that after you read this book, you'll pass it on to someone who is not very religious, and they'll begin to see another way.

The book has twenty-seven short chapters divided into three sections. Each chapter probes an action that we regularly do as part of our everyday living or, as the section titles suggest, every day, every week or every so often. Each chapter is its own story, so you can read the chapters in any order. My hope is that each one will help you view your regular, ordinary, everyday life as spiritual.

Free Bonus Resource Guide for *Everyday Spirituality*

A decorative graphic consisting of three horizontal lines of varying lengths and shades of gray, positioned below the title.

Visit www.JamesHazelwood.net to sign up for resources, a group study guide, ideas and stories of how ordinary people are living out *Everyday Spirituality*.

When you do I'll give you a link to the Resource Guide for this book.

While you are there, send me a note, and let me know about your own Everyday Spirituality.

EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY

Introduction



Like most people, I've always had this tugging sensation that there is something more significant, broader, deeper, more expansive and timeless about life than just the day-to-day tasks of doing the dishes, mowing the lawn and walking to the grocery store. Some people call it God; others call it the universe; still others refer to it using a variety of mystery-based descriptive words. All these descriptions are inadequate, but they are our best attempts at illustrating an ultimate reality beyond the day-to-day. Somehow, I never found a way to connect, understand or nourish a relationship with that ultimate sacred reality. For the sake of ease, I'm calling that God.

I tried devotional books, explored meditation, downloaded prayer guides, and even dabbled with various apps. All these and many other tools were fine; some worked for a while, and a few I still practice. But something was still missing. All these tools seemed to relegate God or the quest for God to a spirituality that was separate from my daily life.

For almost six decades, I have struggled with and felt guilty about not being spiritual enough. As a pastor, I spoke with many people who longed for a spiritual practice. It was my job to advise them, coach them, and nourish their spirituality. I made suggestions, asked questions, and even preached sermons. I felt adrift. This all reminds me of the adage I heard years ago, “We teach best what we most need to learn.”

Then in 2017, while attending a talk by the author Rob Bell, I heard something that made me realize there is a different path. During a Q & A session before Rob’s speech in Boston, Massachusetts, a young college student asked him what kind of spiritual practices he uses. After a long pause, he said, “You mean like, surfing.” There was laughter in the audience of earnest seekers who had come to hear from this former pastor and now quasi-guru. While many laughed, I realized he was serious. I also realized that I have many spiritual practices that don’t fall into the traditional categories. I swim, cycle, and hike. I also read, write, and speak. My mind exploded with all the things I do in life that are indeed very much spiritual. This led me to a reexamination of spirituality – what it is, the times we relegate it to the corners of our life, and other times when it becomes all about all of life.

Six months later, I felt called to write it all down. The idea was simple: a series of concise chapters on different aspects of ordinary everyday life. Each chapter would include a story from my experience along with some theological reflections and some encouragement. Inspiration abounded. I jotted notes and recalled aspects of my life as well as readings and teachings I learned through the years.

Then one morning, in the middle of winter, He showed up and brought it all to a crashing halt. He is that voice inside my head,

the nagging voice of self-doubt. The voice that whispers, “and who are you to think you can write a book?” That voice can take 100 compliments and throw them out the door with just a few words. I’m not sure he is a he, but I call him “him.” I’ve finally given him a name: Earnst. As in earnest, as in you’ve got to earn every single thing in life, including grace. Earnst is a jerk and irritant in my mind and my soul. He tends to show up when things are going well. He is the ultimate party pooper. He can be conniving. Some of my women friends tell me that they have a similar voice; perhaps they call her Earnestine. I don’t know her, but I know my Earnst. When he showed up in the early stages of writing this book, it almost collapsed.

Earnst was able to tap into every single one of my insecurities. He began by attacking my life-long struggles with grammar, syntax, and spelling. He kept bringing up the memory of Mrs. McKinley, my 7th-grade teacher, who posted all our essays on the classroom bulletin board. Mine was right there in the center covered in red ink from her corrections and the big fat red C-. Earnst knows that memory well. He never lets me forget it.

I nearly bagged this whole project.

But it wouldn’t go away. New topics and chapter titles kept bursting forth in my dreams, in my ruminations and readings. It was as if something inside me was pushing it all forward. Then the calendar flipped to a new year. 2019. I would turn 60 this year. I realized that I could no longer double that number and foresee my life continuing. When I turned 30, I could envision doubling it to 60. That was true at 40, and even at 50 I could imagine doubling it to 100, or at least, well, close enough. But, not now. Now it’s real. Time is no longer my friend. I’ve got things I’ve always wanted to do, but have put them off because, well, I had time. So despite Earnst and his ever-present voice, I was going to get this book written.

But I realized I couldn't do it alone. I needed help. I got a coach ... kind of a writing coach. Gary has a practice of working with people who want to write. We met online monthly for video chats. He became my cheerleader and encourager. One day early on he asked me a question. It was kind of off-hand: "Jim, do you know anyone else that has ordinary experiences of God?" I said something in response and let it go. A few days later, as Earnst was working his magic on me while I sat at the keyboard, that question returned. I decided to ask other people.

What began as a few conversations then shifted to an email question sent to my email list. It was a brief email to people who had subscribed, asking if they had any stories of everyday spirituality. Unfortunately, a few days before this email, there had been a spam email that appeared to come from me. That spam told people I was stranded in Nigeria and needed iTunes gift cards. Okay, that's not exactly it, but you get the idea. You've seen those con games played. Because of that spam, many people received my legitimate email asking for stories about everyday spirituality with a degree of suspicion. Geez, I thought, Earnst is even working his magic on the internet. I thought no one would respond.

But that's not what happened. Slowly people began sending me their stories. Some were brief, and others were long and elaborate. Some people shared deeply personal experiences of loss and heartache, in which they'd seen God present. A few wrote to me of strange, bizarre tales that could only be explained by some divine presence. Sadly, several told me they'd been holding on to these stories for a lifetime out of fear. Earnst had been keeping them down as well.

Within a month, I received over 200 responses to my request. Stories, quotes, and vignettes filled my inbox. This flood of

responses overpowered Earnst. He could no longer hold me back. Why? Because it wasn't just me, it was us. The book became a collective effort. I couldn't include every story, not even a majority of them. But every story, every contribution is woven into the spirit of this book. Overtly or covertly, your account is in these pages.

This is a book about everyday life. In living an everyday ordinary, seemingly routine life, we are living out a spirituality. Not the kind of spirituality that's set apart. Not the kind where you go off to a retreat center for silence and good food and walks in nature. I've got nothing against that, and in fact, I enjoy those retreats myself. But I need a spirituality that is real for me on Mondays at 6 a.m. when the alarm goes off, and Thursday during dinner with my kids, and Fridays between the grocery store and the gym. This is a book that connects the stuff we do every day, every week or every so often with God.

I've learned so much from writing this book, and from all who helped make it possible. Earnst is a little disappointed, but he'll live. He always finds a way to make a comeback. But, at least for now, the gift is out in the world. The journey of writing this book has been an experience of the very subject itself. Every day I now see life as an adventure – a spiritual journey.

I invite you to talk to me about what is written here. I've created several resources to facilitate that conversation, and you can find them at the website below. Any book in our 21st Century North American context has to be an introduction to a dialogue. Let's keep the channels of communication open as we all seek to rediscover how everyday spirituality comes to life.

James Hazelwood
Summer 2019
www.jameshazelwood.net

EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY

Section One



Things We Do Every Day

EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY

chapter one

Breathe

Let Us Pray...

These three words, which often sound like “lettuce pray,” make up my least favorite phrase. Why? Because it suggests that we are praying only when we define it as such, and assume some pose such as eyes closed, head bowed and hands folded, or eyes closed, arms outstretched, hands opened. Then we add words. In many religious traditions, we have written prayers – pages and pages of them, and even whole books of prayers.

This is not prayer, folks; this is reading out loud.

Don’t get me wrong; some of these written prayers are beautiful, eloquent and profound. I’ve got some favorites, especially this one from the Lutheran Book of Worship:

O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing

where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But as meaningful and thoughtful as written prayers are, is this the best we can do? Is this all there is to prayer?

One of my favorite anecdotes on this subject involves the Inaugural Prayer Service for the Inauguration of President Bill Clinton in 1993. One of the pastors selected to deliver a prayer was asked by a Clinton administration staffer to supply an advance copy of his prayer. The minister responded: "I ain't prayed it yet."

Okay. I've been a bit harsh here on the written forms of prayer. Many people have found significant meaning in written prayers, and that should not be discounted. My intent here at the outset is to jolt you out of some standardized thinking about the spiritual life. In its place, I am going to suggest that we broaden our definition of the spiritual life to include everyday, day-in-and-day-out aspects of life. In short, I'm saying that what you and I do regularly is spiritual, and our task is to claim it as such. Let's start with something we do every day, every moment of every day.

Breathe in
Breathe out

Take in oxygen, and then expel it from your lungs. This process is foundational to all of life. It's the way your body uses oxygen to break down food into energy. It's also essential for speech, laughter, sobbing, singing and other expressions of emotion and communication. The fact is, when you breathe, you live. Let's turn it into an elementary mathematical calculation. I'm thinkin' spiritual algebra.

Breathing = Living

Many ancient languages and religious origin stories have connections between breath and life and spirit. The first human is brought to life by breathing. God breathes life into earthen mud as a way of birthing Adam. Let's not get hung up on viewing this story as a literal event; it's more potent than that. It's a narrative ancient people used to tell a more profound truth, namely, that the spiritual realm and the material realm are void if separated, but when you bring them together, life happens.

The Hebrew people had a word for this breath: *ruach* (pronounced rū'ăḥ). It's an ancient word that appears hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, and is often used interchangeably for breath, spirit, wind, and sometimes mind. The *ruach* imparts the divine image to humanity and animates the creature with the dynamic of life. You and I are connected to God in *ruach*. If you are looking for a scripture passage to summarize this point, I'll refer you to Job 33:4: "*The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.*"

Conversely, when we end our time on earth, it's not unusual to hear it said that someone has "breathed their last breath." Years ago I stood with a family at the bedside of their grandfather as he breathed his last breath. We stood in silence until his daughter said to me, "Did you see that?" I had. We had witnessed not only his last breath, but also the departure of his spirit.

How many other religious traditions include this understanding of breath as life? We see it in the practice of yoga; it's also central to all forms of meditation, from Christian to Buddhist to Zoroastrian. I just like that word Zoroastrian; it's fun to say, and it's the kind of word you can use to impress or confuse people at a dinner party. ("Hey, did you know that

Freddie Mercury, the late singer of the band Queen, was a Zoroastrian?”) And in case you’re curious, the Zoroastrian religion dates back to Persia in the year 1500 BCE. It is an early monotheistic religion that likely influenced the development of Judaism. Among its primary contributions to Western thought was a dualism of good and evil, with human beings facing daily choices that have both personal and cosmic significance. Yes, there’s a whole lot more that you can look up; I couldn’t just leave you hanging there with that Freddie Mercury reference.

Athletes attend to their breath as they measure their aerobic capacity. Singers control their breathing to produce the tones that bring us joy. You and I commonly use expressions such as “the performance took my breath away.” When we are particularly moved by a speech or a game, we often use the word inspired, which brings together both the spiritual and the physical. ‘To inspire’ is an old expression that was originally used in describing a quality of a divine or supernatural being, to ‘impart a truth or idea to someone.’

The Franciscan Priest Richard Rohr has pointed out that the ancient Hebrew word for God, Yahweh, means “I am” or “I exist.” It’s not actually a name; it’s a description. According to Rohr, the phrasing of Yahweh is best pronounced by breathing in “Yah” and breathing out “Weh.”¹ To speak the word is to breathe the word. To utter the sounds is to participate in the act of being. To state that God exists is to experience existence itself. Lest I lose you in this magical, mystical ride, here is the bottom line:

If you are breathing, you are praying.

Are you looking for an everyday spirituality? Are you trying to figure out how you can be more spiritual, as if it’s a competition? Take a breath. Go ahead, do it. In fact, you

cannot *not* do it. Try not being spiritual for a few seconds; hold your breath. That's right. Stop breathing. Take a moment to act in defiance of God, of all that is sacred and holy and life-giving in this world. Are you still withholding your breath?

To breathe is to live.

To breathe is to be in the presence of the Living and Holy Sacred One.

To breathe is to continue this long, slow and steady journey we call life.

To breathe is to practice everyday spirituality.

Let go of all that guilt and shame about not reading enough devotional books, or not thinking profound thoughts, or not exercising a regular morning ritual. Those are all fine and well and good if you choose them as expressions. But for those who wonder...

am I doing enough to be a spiritual person?

am I doing enough to be a Christian?

am I doing enough to help my kids see the value of faith?

am I doing enough to have God love me, like me or at least tolerate me?

am I doing enough to _____ (fill in the blank)?

Breathe.

You are doing enough because you are breathing. Because you are breathing, you are expressing a deep connection to the holy, the sacred, the divine. Because you are breathing, you are

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praying. Because you are breathing you have experienced the coming together of the spiritual and the material.

So breathe, relax, and enjoy a life of everyday spirituality.

chapter two

Thank

What's your favorite holiday?

In my experience, your stage of life probably influences how you'd answer that question. Most children would probably name Christmas as their favorite holiday, while most adults would choose the Thanksgiving celebration as their preference.

I base that conclusion partly on my own experience every November, when I frequently hear friends and neighbors express sentiments such as: "It's my favorite holiday of the year." When I inquire as to why, the speakers often add comments like these:

"It's all about people and gathering with no emphasis on things."

"I love the traditional meal; it brings back so many good memories."

"It's the least commercial holiday."

“How can you not love a day set aside for giving thanks?”

Thanksgiving has its roots in a harvest festival but was solidified as a national day of thanks under President Abraham Lincoln, who established it amid the American Civil War. Lincoln’s proclamation acknowledges: “The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies.”

The proclamation goes on to acknowledge a whole range of benefits of the American experience and the bounties of nature, despite the constant presence of war. Lincoln proclaims: “They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God.”

He then offers what is essentially a prayer, that God would “care [for] all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.”²

Thanksgiving Day affords us a time for gratitude and atonement. Many people spend the day with family or friends, sharing a meal together. The focus shifts from the busyness of daily life to a ritual of relationships and appreciation. But in 2010, several large brick-and-mortar stores tried to change all that when they decided to infringe on this sacred American holiday.³

The strategy was a blatant attempt to increase market share by interrupting the Thanksgiving holiday with early Black Friday shopping. More retailers jumped on board in 2011 and

2012. By 2016, however, many chains were backpedaling and once again starting their annual promotional frenzy on the Friday after Thanksgiving. While the long-term trend toward 24/7/365 shopping will no doubt continue, there was at least a brief moment of rebellion.

Americans need and want their day of gratitude. We realize that we are human beings and not simply cogs in a commercial enterprise. President Lincoln set aside this uniquely American holiday as a prayer of hopefulness for a divided nation; this timely reminder is as valid today as it was 160 years ago.

When it comes to everyday spirituality, I'm suggesting Thanksgiving Day is every day.

Many parents are diligent when it comes to training children in the value and appropriateness of saying thank you. I've watched this unfold in recent years with my grandchildren. As other adults bring the children gifts, offer kind gestures, or hand them ice cream cones, one or both of their parents will say, "And what do you say?" This inevitably prompts the obligatory "Thank you" from the children. On occasion, the words can get stretched out, as in "thaaaaaank yooooooooou." One might wonder about the sincerity of the words, but that's not the point at this young age. Parents are attempting to build habits, and saying thank you is a habit of high value in our society.

And I've discovered it's a habit that is much appreciated and frequently practiced. I recently conducted an informal exercise in counting the number of times I heard the phrase thank you. I spent an ordinary Saturday interacting with people in a wide variety of settings, including a meeting, a run to the grocery store, a drive-through at a nearby coffee shop and dinner at home with my wife. This little research project resulted in

a surprising discovery: 34 “Thank you” interactions out of 47 exchanges. I thought that was rather high because they occurred in ordinary everyday encounters. It made me realize how common our exchanges around gratitude have become, and how much we appreciate them.

Expressions of gratitude are even more potent in written form. In an era of email, texting and mailboxes crammed with junk mail, what stands out? Amid an average of 848 pieces of junk mail every year,⁴ a handwritten envelope stands out, and when the contents include a handwritten personalized thank you note, I consider that a form of sacred text.

The handwritten thank you note is an offering, an affirmation of a covenantal relationship that we consummated over dinner, coffee or a tangerine. Thank you. When we express appreciation and gratitude, we certify that an event, however small or large, has sealed our relationship in a way that has power – the power to heal, mend, even transform the future.

The expression of gratitude and appreciation is ubiquitous in all of the faith traditions of the world. Did Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or Buddha have anything to say on this subject? How many times does the word “thank” appear in the Bible? 206. The word “thanksgiving”? 69.

*“Singing aloud a song of **thanksgiving** and telling all your wondrous deeds.”* The Psalmist writes in Psalm 26:7.

*“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.”* St. Paul writes in Philippians 4:6.

“[Jesus] took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” Matthew 15:36

“These two people are hard to find in the world. Which two? The one who is first to do a kindness, and the one who is grateful and thankful for a kindness done.” The Buddha, in the *Anguttara Nikaya*.⁵

“The great warehouse doors open; I fill with gratitude, chewing a piece of sugarcane.” The Islamic Sufi Poet Rumi.⁶

“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” The Christian Mystic Meister Eckhart.⁷

I think you get the point.

You say “thank you” every single day. Most likely it rolls right off your tongue and you don’t even know it.

Someone opens a door as you walk into the grocery store.
“Thank you.”

A co-worker offers to buy you a cup of coffee. “Thank you.”

Your teenager looks at you and smiles for the first time in weeks, and you think to yourself, *Huh? What’s going on? Has the universe realigned itself?* “Oh, ah, thank you.”

The ancient Hebrew people had a word for thanksgiving: *Todah*, which has roots in a similar word, *Yadah*. *Todah* shows up everywhere in the Bible – when choirs sing, gifts are offered and prayers are spoken. It’s rooted in the idea of a hand extended in adoration. But, notice how thanksgiving connects with music and singing and, wow, can’t you hear the harmony? When we offer thanks it’s as if we are singing a song, humming a tune or laying down a soundtrack for a movie musical.

When you say thank you, you are not merely repeating some autopilot, obligatory, culture-bound phrase. Okay, so yes, on

one level that is what you are doing. But, that's not *all* you are doing. You are also singing gratitude and saying a prayer of appreciation and connecting with thousands of years of spiritual practitioners. You are doing a holy thing. You are engaging in a spiritual practice every day.

So speak a word or a phrase, write an email, jot a note, break bread together, open a door, buy someone a coffee. Speak and listen for the *Todah* singing across the universe, praising God.

Can we cue the American poet Walt Whitman right about now? Stop and read the following poem out loud, like it's from a musical or a 19th-century hip-hop song. Like Lincoln, Whitman endured that Civil War, and his words are a poignant reminder of thanksgiving for all of life, even in times of heartache and despair.

THANKS IN OLD AGE.

Thanks in old age – thanks ere I go,
For health, the midday sun, the impalpable air –
for life, mere life,
For precious ever-lingering memories, (of you my
mother dear – you, father – you, brothers, sisters,
friends,)
For all my days – not those of peace alone – the days
of war the same,
For gentle words, caresses, gifts from foreign lands,
For shelter, wine and meat – for sweet appreciation,
(You distant, dim unknown – or young or old –
countless, un-specified, readers below'd,
We never met, and ne'er shall meet—and yet our
souls embrace, long, close and long;)

Thank

For beings, groups, love, deeds, words, books – for
colors, forms,

For all the brave strong men – devoted, hardy men –
who've forward sprung in freedom's help, all years,
all lands,

For braver, stronger, more devoted men – (a special
laurel ere I go, to life's war's chosen ones,

The cannoneers of song and thought – the great
artillerists – the foremost leaders, captains of the
soul:)

As soldier from an ended war return'd – As traveler
out of myriads, to the long procession retrospective,
Thanks – joyful thanks! – a soldier's, traveler's thanks.

– WALT WHITMAN (1819-1892)

