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Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Carla Long 00:33

Hello, and welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Carla Long. And today you're listening to the series Holy Grounds. And I'm super excited to introduce my friend Katie Harmon McLaughlin. She is the Spiritual Formation Specialist with Community of Christ and she is the guru of all things spiritual. If I have a spiritual question, I go straight to the top immediately and ask her. So Katie, I'm super happy that you're on the show.

Katie Harmon-McLaughlin 00:58

Thanks, Carla. And that is a daunting introduction.

Carla Long 01:02

Well, you know, I'm pretty good at daunting introductions. And I'm not a liar, though. So I really do go to Katie quite often with spiritual questions. That's not a lie. So, today, we're talking about a really important topic that I think is a part of a lot of our lives, but maybe we just don't realize how important it is in our lives. Or maybe we just don't even kind of get it. So, today, we're talking about prayer. And when I approached Katie about this topic, she said, That's one of my favorite things to talk about. And I'm like, Yes, I knew I came to the right person. So, Katie, before we jump into prayer, um, I would love for you to introduce yourself and tell me a little about who you are.

Katie Harmon-McLaughlin 01:42

Sure, um, well, as you already said, I work for Community of Christ as Spiritual Formation Specialist, and also serve as a member of the Formation Ministries Team. So, I get to work with really great people who produce resources and put on World Church events and, um, all those fun things. And I also live in Independence, Missouri with my partner, Zac, um, and my daughter, Emma.

Carla Long 02:12

Who, I know, keeps you very, very busy. Zac and Emma. Both. (Yes.) So, Katie, I really kind of want to start maybe, like, a little bit of a baseline level when it comes to prayer. And, um, what would you define prayer as? Like, what is prayer in general? Do you have a definition for it?

Katie Harmon-McLaughlin 02:37

Yeah, you know, I would say that prayer, at its essence, is an expression of our relationship with God. So, prayer is the way that we communicate and open ourselves to receive divine communication.

Carla Long 02:53

Oh, so, if, like, in the verb form, prayer is like an opening, it sounds like. You know, like an opening of ourselves, perhaps. Would you also say it's like an opening of God? Or no, I mean, I don't really know. I don't know.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 03:07

Yeah, you know, there's actually one of my favorite quotes about prayer is from Marjorie Suchocki. And she says, Prayer is the act of bringing our moment by moment connectedness to God into our consciousness. So, and, and I'll say that again, because that's like, it's like a short quote, but it's packed, right? Prayer is the act of bringing our moment by moment connectedness to God into our consciousness. And, so, that definition is affirming that God is present with us all the time, in every condition, every circumstance of life. And those moments where we are praying are moments where we wake up or become conscious to that relationship and connection that already exists.

Carla Long 03:56

I love that. I love that because actually, I talk about that all the time. I talk about God moments with my congregation and with other people. And, you know, like I always say, I think that God is always present, we just, those God moments are the moments we wake up to God and recognize God. So, it sounds in a very similar way. How cool. Very cool. So, now that we have a definition of prayer, I know that we had some people asking about maybe what is the purpose of prayer? And on top of that, how do our intentions and our expectations impact our prayers?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 04:32

Yeah, that's a great question. Um, you know, I have found that a lot of times when we come to prayer, we expect to feel God in a very specific way. Um, often when I have, as a spiritual director, I work with a lot of people who are exploring their prayer lives. And, um, a lot of times the questions revolve around, Am I doing this right? You know, how do I, how do I get God to listen to me or why am I not having the experience that I want to have? And, so, I think it's really helpful for us to recognize that, that's one of the reasons I love that definition. That prayer can occur in any condition of our lives, whether we are feeling joy and peace and connectedness or whether we're feeling despair and distance, um, God is still present. And, so, if we are always expecting to feel God in a certain way, we may miss the moments where God is revealing God's self in a new or different way.

Carla Long 05:32

I think that's super important to recognize, you know, because sometimes here in Utah, I hear people talk about God, and they, they only think that God is present in their lives when everything is going well. And then when everything is going poorly, either God has walked away from them, or, or whatever. It's like that, um, the poem Footsteps, you know, when Jesus carried you when things are rough, you know, like, I actually believe that's kind of true that God walks with us throughout that entire thing. And I'm glad that you said that. I'm really glad that you talked about how God is with us through that entire time. So, I think, you know, you were talking about how people in your spiritual, uh, your spiritual director said, Am I praying right? So, does that have to do with maybe how people image God, how people think about God? And, um, so, like, do how, does how we picture God, uh, make a difference in our prayer life, like those God images that come to us? Like, how does that work?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 06:38

A hundred percent. Um, the way that we imagine God will absolutely impact the relationship we have with the God we imagine. Um, and so if we imagine God as unconditionally loving and welcoming, um, we might come to prayer in a very different way than if we imagine God is distant and judgmental. Um, and just like the Marjorie Suchocki quote that I shared, that is expressing an image of God as constantly present while some might have an image of God, as, you know, far removed up in some other space outside of our own daily experience here and now on this planet. Um, so, those different images impact how we come to prayer, what we expect from prayer, um, and how we continue to grow in prayer.

Carla Long 07:34

So, I'm assuming that, you know, the image of God changes throughout your life. Like the image I have of God when I'm five years old, five years old, wasn't, isn't the same image, image I have of God when I'm 44. So, how would that image of God change? Or does it change? I mean, maybe it is the same for other people and maybe I'm just a weirdo. So, um, how does that image of God change throughout our lives?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 07:58

Yeah, I think our images of God, um, most definitely change and shift throughout our lives, espec, especially if we're on an intentional journey of spiritual growth and development. Um, you know, you mentioned our images of God when we are five. When, when we're five, we tend to just developmentally see the world very literally and in very concrete terms. And, so, just based on culture and things that we've heard and read. You know, a five-year old might imagine God as more of like, far removed, out in outer space, some giant being, you know, all those kinds of things. Whereas, um, as you grow in, in relationship and intimacy with God, um, God's ever present, God is ever present might become more of an image that comes up in prayer. Um, and I also know a lot of people, you know, go through different periods of life, and I was one of them, where our images of God fall apart. And we struggle to know or understand who God is, or what God looks like, or how to experience God or how to relate to God. And those can be really, really important and powerful, but also painful moments, um, where God is actually becoming more in us than perhaps God was before. So, I think that's actually very common, um, but it doesn't make it easy.

Carla Long 09:23

So, why would those moments be painful moments when, when God is like, we're understanding God in a much bigger way?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 09:32

Well, I think there's a sense of loss. Um, if we have had an image of God that we have relied on for many years and suddenly that image of God is gone or is starting to fall apart, it can feel like God is gone or is starting to feel, fall apart. And that can be a really hard experience. Um, and until a new image kind of emerges to fill the void, it can feel very lonely, isolating, sometimes terrifying, um, to not know who or what God is or how to connect with God or if God is. So, I think that's where some of the pain can come from.

Carla Long 10:18

It sounds to me, and maybe just because I work in Utah and I work with a lot of people who go through faith transitions, it sounds to me like maybe prayer or how you view God through prayer can be a first sign of a faith transition, or how you're seeing God in a new and different way. And not that you have to do a faith transition from one church to another church. It's not always that dramatic. But I'm assuming faith transitions can also be like, just small little jumps all the time.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 10:44

Yes. I mean, faith transitions are actually a normative part of a spiritual journey. Um, no matter how you grew up or where you went to church, um, you know, the relationship with God is continually evolving as we grow. And, so, like, for me, I can remember the exact moment that I think my faith transition really started, where I was asked to offer a public prayer at a football game in college. And I had been deconstructing my entire religious worldview. And it wasn't until I was asked to say that prayer in a very public setting that I realized that I had no idea who God was anymore. And there was something about my prayer that felt so hollow and uncomfortable and unfamiliar that it was the last public prayer I offered for a long time. I felt out of integrity because the words that I was using to describe God that I would have used before no longer matched what my experience was and there was no God image there to fill the void in that moment. Um, so, it was a very painful time of losing God, but also losing the way to relate to God and not knowing what my prayer life could or should look like.

Carla Long 12:05

So, you're making it sound to me, and correct me if I'm wrong, but you're making it sound like having that God image, in your mind, is a really important part of prayer. Would you say that to be true?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 12:19

Yeah, and I don't think we're always conscious of our God images, like, you, you know, if someone asked me today, What is your image of God? I don't know that I would have one distinct answer. Um, I image God in many different ways. Um, but I think, at the time, I was letting go of some images of God. And in the letting go, it became clear what images of God I was losing. Um, I was losing God as protector. I was losing God as Father. I was losing God as, um, a pers, like a person or some kind of being that would, um, give my life purpose and direction. And, so, as I was letting go, I was realizing those losses and that helps me identify the images that I was losing. Um, and then it took me years to figure out the images that I was gaining.

Carla Long 13:16

So interesting that you say that because you take me immediately to the, our, our congregation here in Salt Lake. And many of us who pray in Salt Lake, um, are very, um, intentional about not saying, father, for instance, because a lot of the people who come to our church, um, would always pray to Heavenly Father. That would be the only image that they would pray to. And so many of us try really hard not to use the word father. Some people still do. And I have never really realized that, until this moment, that the words that we pray to, who we pray to, generous God or loving creator or whatever words we choose, could be rather jarring to people sitting in the pews who have never heard that kind of language before. So, actually, you just, you helped me realize that perhaps, I mean, I'm going to keep

doing what I'm doing because I think sometimes jarring is okay. But it, it could be a, a surprise to people.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 14:18

Yeah, well, and I often talk, you know, to congregational leaders about how important it is to normalize multiple images of God from the pulpit so that those images don't feel so jarring, but then our children grow up hearing the many possibilities of ways to describe an image God demonstrated in their first experiences in communal public life and church. So, the ways that we pray even out loud with each other can help form and shape images of God that we have in community.

Carla Long 14:53

And I'm immediately brought to one of the hymns in our hymnbook, uh, number five, Bring Many Names, when it talks about all the different, um, strong mother God, warm Father God, old aching God, young growing God, and how all of those describe God. And, of course, there's no way we'll ever be able to completely describe God seeing as how God is mystery behind, beyond comprehension. But I do think bringing in all of those adjectives to describe God can open people up to see God in whole new ways which could be really cool.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 15:25

Yes. And I'm so glad you said that because, to me, that is one of the core pieces of, of naming and recognizing our images of God is also recognizing that no image contains God. Every image is only pointing toward the mystery of God that is unfathomable, incomprehensible, and yet intimately close to us in all things. Um, and that is so important for us because when we attach God to an image and then we lose that image, we feel like we lose God. But when God is beyond our images and we hold our images lightly as ways of trying to understand and relate and connect, they can be life giving and healing.

Carla Long 16:08

That is beautiful. I'm really glad you said that. I'm really glad you said that. That is helpful. So, um, I want to move us back. I, I don't think we've stepped away from prayer, but I want to bring us back to prayer. Now that we have, like, say, like, we have this, um, image of God and we hold them lightly, I love that, we hold those images of God lightly. How do you actually pray? Is there a way to pray? I mean, I'm going back to your spiritual directees and how they're saying, Am I doing this right? Um, do you address God first? Do you follow what Jesus taught us? You know, or what do you just do? How do you pray?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 16:47

Um, that is another great question. And that's a question that the disciples asked Jesus in the Bible. Um, they say, Lord, teach us to pray. And, so, it's natural that, um, any of us would be wondering how to relate to God. And, um, I'd love to share a quote by Anne Lamott which is probably one of my favorite quotes on how to pray. So, she says, It doesn't matter how you pray, with your head bowed in silence or crying out in grief or dancing. Churches are good for prayer. But so our garages and cars and mountains and showers and dance floors. Years ago, I wrote an essay that began, Some people think that God is in the details. But I have come to believe that God is in the bathroom. And I love that quote.

I mean, that's like very typical Anne Lamott, if you're an Anne Lamott reader, um, but she's really describing how God is with us and present in every condition, in every place. And, so, prayer can take many, many forms. Um, and that, that is also one of the things that has been so liberating for me in discovering the varieties of ways to prayer in my own pray, prayer life because sometimes one prayer really works for a while and then another form of prayer is needed. Um, so, there are ways of praying where you don't have to use any words, where if you don't know who God is or what God is, you don't have to address God as anything. You can just be present in the silence, to love, to mystery, to the real, whatever you decide to name it, whatever, you can name it in this moment, and just let it be, um, and be in the presence is the prayer with no words or images needed. And then there's other forms of prayer that help us review our memories throughout the day, like the prayer of examen or, um, prayers that help us engage deeply in Scripture or, um, you know, prayers that we might speak before a meal or with our families or at other times throughout the day when we just feel a need to connect. So, prayer can look, um, like many different things for many different people. And I think that's something really helpful to remember, especially when it feels like we're not sure how to pray, that as long as our intention is to be present, to connect in relationship with, with God, um, or whatever we can name God in this moment, then that is prayer.

Carla Long 19:26

That word intention, like, I knew you're going to say it because I was thinking this entire time, like, that word intention, I think, is probably, and for me, the most important word when it comes to prayer um, being intentional about being present with God. Although, you know, public prayers are really hard. Like you were saying earlier, there are some people who have the most beautiful prayers I've ever heard and there are prayers that I remember from years and years and years ago that people have said and I don't know if I have that gift. I don't think I have that gift of public prayer. So, I, I do feel a little bit nervous, even as a professional, quote unquote, minister, giving prayers in public. Those public prayers can be a little daunting. But if I'm intentional about it, that's really all I need to do. Right? Like, that's, if you're int, to have intentionality, God is with you.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 20:22

Absolutely, yeah. And I'm, I'm trying to remember, it's another Anne Lamott, I think it's a book, where she talks about how, the three prayers, like the three most basic prayers you'll ever need in your life are help, thanks, wow. And I love that. I love that it can be very, very simple that, um, while, while beautiful, poetic prayers can certainly draw us close to God and one another in community, um, prayer does not have to be long or complicated or poetic for it to come from the heart. And God desires prayer that comes from the heart above everything.

Carla Long 21:00

And so I'm assuming that means that prayers, and I think you've alluded to this, but we haven't said it outright, that prayers can just be completely wordless. There's no need to actually say any words at all when we are saying a prayer like in the bathroom, what Anne Lamott said. So, there's no need for words at all, even though it would be might be a little bit awkward if you're standing at the pulpit and some people are waiting for you to pray and you just don't say anything. But I mean, maybe it'd be good to normally, normalize that, too.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 21:29

Absolutely. I mean, and, and I've done that, you know, like, to say, we're just going to take a few moments in the silence to ground and settle ourselves in the reality of God. And then just let the silence be the silence and people utter the prayers they need to pray silently or just say nothing at all. And then, Amen. Thank you God for being with us. I mean, it can be that simple. So, um, often, we feel a lot of pressure about public prayer. But I think it's valuable to our communities when they can experience multiple forms of public prayer and prayers that feel very poetic and beautiful, but also prayers that feel very real. Um, I remember the first time I heard a public prayer that started with, Good morning, God. And it just felt so, um, casual and relational and real. Or when people are, are, started prayer with just like, Hi, God. You know, I mean, those, those prayers can be just as meaningful as, um, the very poetic prayers that we hear that are impressive and, um, that we feel like we can never, we can never live up to.

Carla Long 22:46

Yeah, I actually remember a prayer. It was very poetic. And this person talked about like walking into a secret garden, you know, like, and I immediately thought about that book, The Secret Garden, and I was so into it with her as she was praying, like, Oh, my gosh, I'm so in this. But maybe for other people, that didn't mean anything at all. So it is important to have a wide variety of prayer during public worship. It sounds, that's what it sounds like, to me at least. (Yeah.) So, I'm going to ask a question that might sound a little bit selfish because I am the pastor of the Salt Lake City congregation where we have a lot of people going through faith transitions and, um, from one church to another church and it's a big deal and they're really hard and they're really painful. And, so, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about when you were going through your deconstruction, um, and it sounded like maybe that happened in college, I don't know. Um, how did your prayer life change from one place to another place? And how did you get through that?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 23:48

Um, yeah, that, that time of faith deconstruction was really important. And I feel like it's happen, actually happened multiple times throughout my life. Never as, like, intensely as the first time. But there have been multiple periods where I have, um, you know, gone through periods of, like, what I would call spiritual darkness, where I struggled to relate to God or some image of God was shifting or changing or crumbling. And I was invited to pay attention to that very deliberately. But I would say, in college, um, was the one where I felt like I lost God completely. And, um, I remember telling just a couple of people that I really trusted that I didn't think I believed in God anymore. God didn't make sense to me. Um, I had deconstructed all my images of God. I'd been asking really hard questions. And that was really hard to me because I had always kept a prayer journal and that was something that had been very grounding to me. Um, and so one of the things that I did in that time, which I highly recommend, is, um, I didn't yet know about spiritual direction, but I did meet with a therapist. And, um, this person that I was meeting with wondered how it would feel if, instead of keeping a prayer journal where I wrote every prayer, Dear Father God, if instead I started writing prayers to my heart, um, because I, I felt that impulse to pray. I felt that desire to express something of meaning in myself, but I didn't feel like I could pray to God because I didn't know who God was. And so for several months, I kept this journal. And, um, I would just write prayers to my heart, uh, because that was the only language I knew how to use at that time. And over a period of time, I started to realize how my prayers were shifting and changing.

And, um, an awareness opened in me one day that I was still praying to God, that I was discovering the indwelling God, not a god far away, distant, remote, that I wanted to protect and to save me, but a God who was already present within me in a very deep and intimate, um, and mysterious way. And, so, writing those prayers to my heart, ended up becoming my transition to discovering God in a much deeper way within myself and then within all of creation, and so that God image of remote and distant became God, um, like, shockingly, amazingly present. And I remember, you know, walking through my campus, um, as I was going through this transition, and it was like my eyes were opening for the first time in my life. Like, I was really seeing the colors of the leaves on the trees and, like, feeling every step. And it was just this sense of, like, waking up to the holiness, to the sacredness, to the beauty of life in a way that I had been straining so hard to find God and God was abundantly present, being revealed in everything around me and within me the whole time. Um, so that's, that's a summary of that experience. But it ended up being one of the most important experiences of my life. And so I'll never regret asking the hard questions that caused me to lose God and then find God in an even richer way.

Carla Long 27:46

I feel like what you just described is, like, happens all the time, at least to me. Like, if I'm going for something so, so, so, so hard, like, the second I let it go and walk away from it and step away, is the second everything seems to just work, whether it be God or whatever else that's happening in your life, whatever we're holding on to so tightly, letting that open up. And, like, you, I still go back to what you said earlier is, um, holding those images lightly. And what a beautiful, making me tear up Katie, that's a really beautiful story. So, Katie, I kind of want to ask another question about something in Community of Christ, at least, we have, of course, prayers of administration and, um, ordination prayers and things like that. So, how do those prayers fit into the definition of prayer? Like, when you have, are praying over someone, oh, and a confirmation prayer, so on and so forth. So, we use prayer at these incredibly sacred moments in our lives, oh, and, uh, communion. So, prayer happens in, around most of our sacraments, these moments where God is reaching out to us and we're reaching out to God. So, how do you, how would you talk about prayers like that?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 29:12

I think those prayers can be really meaningful and formative experiences for us individually and in community. And, you know, those, those sacramental forms of prayer are ways that we can kind of tap into mystery together and make the invisible visible for just a moment whether it's, you know, communion, the very tangible elements of bread and, in our tradition, grape juice, or, um, baptism, water, um, the, the prayer laying on of hands for the sick where we anoint someone's head with oil and put hands on the head, all of those very tangible, physical, um, rituals that are part of our sacrament, I think, help make, um, that mystery more alive and present for us through those symbols and actions in community.

Carla Long 30:13

So in some ways, I kind of picture that as, that communal part of those prayers, I picture that as also saying something to the community that we believe that God is present already in these, this person's life and that we want everyone to be a part of that, say, for an ordination or something. Um, the ordination is not just between the person and God. The ordination is part of that community. So, I feel

like, and correct me if I'm wrong, that that prayer is inviting that entire community to be a part of that, because we are not only just listening, but we are participating as a congregation.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 30:54

Yes, and, and I would say, every, every sacrament like that is, um, going back to that first definition from Marjorie Suchocki, An act of bringing our moment by moment connectedness to God into our consciousness. And we're doing that publicly. And we're doing that communally in a really powerful way. But it still falls under that description, that definition that, um, God does not wait for us, for just special times when we show up in exactly the right way. But God is with us all the time, in every condition, in every place, and sacraments are our attempt at making that visible and intentional for the community as we grow spiritually together.

Carla Long 31:41

So, there was one prayer in Community of Christ that I didn't mention, and I didn't mention on purpose, because I wanted to talk specifically about it. And that's the evangelist blessing in Community of Christ. And one thing I love about evangelist blessings now, um, is that you really build a relationship with your evangelist before. Um, and so it feels like it's like a triangle relationship between you and the evangelist and God which is very cool because there's a, a big relationship that has been formed. Um, I do want to talk a little bit about in the predominant religion here in Utah, the patriarchal blessing isn't exactly like that. The patriarchal blessing sounds to me as someone who's been Community of Christ my whole life and just learning about, um, the Mormon Church, it, it sounds like it's more like a fortune telling kind of thing. And, so, some people have been disappointed in those prayers and hearing those prayers. And some people think that that's exactly what they should have been hearing. So, can we talk a little bit about how, about those differences, perhaps, and maybe how that could be kind of manipulating God in some way?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 32:52

Yes, uh, and first of all, just want to affirm what you said about the evangelist blessing that, um, I think it's a really powerful relationship of spiritual companionship where your, the evangelist that you're working with really does get to know you and listen to the longings and desires of your heart and where you are with God. Um, and it was actually that experience with the evangelist who gave me my evangelist blessing that led me into spiritual direction which has been one of the most important formative experiences of my life. Um, and, in terms of, you know, some of the differences between evangelist and patriarchal blessings in the LDS tradition, um, like you, I grew up Community of Christ so I don't have any personal experience at all, um, with those patriarchal blessings. Um, but I have spent time with people, um, who are former Mormons who have, as they've gone through faith transition, tried to reconcile where their former blessing fits in with their new experience of faith. And for some, it doesn't have a place anymore, and that's okay. Maybe that was part of what was painful to lose or discard in the, the period of faith transition. Um, but for others, their blessing still speaks meaningfully to them and that can be surprising and perplexing when they're recognizing that their images and experiences of God then were very different than how they would image and experience God now. Um, and, so, you know, as I've worked with some of, of those people in the past who have had those kinds of experiences, you know, we've talked about how it's all the same God. You know, God is always expressed imperfectly by imperfect people and institutions. Um, both in the LDS tradition

and Community of Christ, uh, we fumble over our expressions of God with each other and sometimes unintentionally wound each other and sometimes manipulate each other without even realizing it because we think we're doing the right thing. But it's the same God, the God beyond all of our images, is the same God who has been present to you every single moment of your life. And, so, it makes sense that even if you were going through a period of time that felt unhealthy, toxic, painful, um, oppressive in your, um, previous faith experience, that there were moments that came shining out where something of meaning or sacredness was still present because God was still present to you, even if God was expressed poorly or in an unhealthy way. Um, and so for some, those patriarchal blessings still have a lot of meaning and they, they recognize that maybe the person giving it had an amazing intent and God spoke through in a way that was unexpected and that's okay. Um, and even though we image and express God differently, now, it's all the same God. Beneath all of our images, um, God is God and God has never not been present with us.

Carla Long 36:05

And we are given permission, I'm assuming, to really be okay to let go of those unhealthy images of God, too. Like we can let those go and, and walk away from those and say, Those might have been helpful for me in the past, but they are no longer helpful for me now, and to reimagine God in however we need to reimagine God. Is that true?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 36:27

Absolutely. Um, and I think that also comes with an amount of grace for people who still use those images. Um, you know, I know for a while I, I was so resistant every time I heard any masculine expression of God. I would just instantly shut down and I would, it was like, I was saying to myself, I can't experience God here because I've rejected this image. And, so, even if it was this really sweet lady in church who was just using a prayer form she's used her whole life, I was resistant to it. And I would be like, No, God can't be here for me because God has nothing to do with masculine expressions. And, you know, since then, um, while it was important for me at that time in my life to discard and walk away from a toxic image of God that was not serving me, that was not life giving for me, um, I have kind of come back to, um, a recognition that all of us use different images of God at different times. And that doesn't excuse us when we do that consciously and still continue to use harmful images. Um, but it does give me more patience for people who use different images than me and, you know, might still have that good intention to connect with God and others in their heart. And so God will be where God will be. Um, and sometimes God will show up even in the places that we feel we've rejected, as we're talking to other people, and offering grace and patience in our different journeys.

Carla Long 38:00

I love the way you say that or said that because, you know, like, when I asked that question, I used the word manipulating God, I actually immediately felt bad about that because, uh, I do believe that people do what they think is right a, a majority of the time, not everyone does. But I, a majority of the time, people do believe that what they're doing is right and what they believe God is calling them to. And, so, I felt bad about using that. So, thank you for making me sound a lot nicer than probably what I sh, what I deserved. Well, Katie, this has just been really helpful for me. And I appreciate how much grace you offer people when it comes to prayer life. So, let me just, um, try and do a little recap of what we talked

about here. So, prayer is pretty much, pretty much happens at any time during the day, during the week, during the month. Uh, when, whenever we're intentional, and actually probably when we're not intentional, prayer seems to happen. What else did we talk about? We talked about how, oh, imaging God is very important. And the how are, are we image God and, so, like, it sounds like if we're having trouble with our prayer life or feel like we're having trouble with our prayer life, maybe finding a new way to imagine God or image God is a good place to get started. And we talked about how prayer is something that can happen, oh, public prayer can have, can take many, many different forms and is super, super important. So, is there anything else that we talked about that, uh, you want to make sure you we bring up again or anything else that I didn't ask that you would like to say?

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 39:39

Um, well, I think because I'm such a nerd, I would love to close with one more quote, if that's okay um, and it comes from Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in the World* which, um, is a book that I would highly recommend to anyone who is just wanting to explore prayer and the spiritual life, um, especially if you're not totally sure who or what God is. She does such a good job of being so open and inclusive of a variety of spiritual paths. But Barbara Brown Taylor says, Prayer is waking up to the presence of God no matter where I am or what I am doing. When I am fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front of me, when I am electrically aware of the tremendous gift of being alive, when I am able to give myself holy to the moment I am in, then I am in prayer. Prayer is happening. And it is not necessarily something that I am doing. God is happening. And I am lucky enough to know that I am in the midst. And I love that definition because it again reminds us that, um, there's nothing we need to do to make God happen. God is already happening within us and around us and all things. Um, and the moment we turn ourselves with that intention toward God, in whatever state we are in, even if we're not sure who God is, um, that is prayer. However it happens, wherever it happens, that is prayer and it is enough and it is faithful even if we don't have a name for God. It's that movement and intention of the heart reaching out to that something more, um, that is the heart of what prayer is really about.

Carla Long 41:32

Oh, that was lovely. And Barbara Brown Taylor, her words are just, they hit you right where it, in the feel. So, thank you for, um, closing the podcast with that quote. She's pretty amazing. And so are you. Thank you so much, Katie, for a wonderful podcast about prayer. I, I hope that this helps some of our listeners. It did help me to make some realizations about prayer in my congregation and, and in my life. So, I appreciate you so much. Thank you so much.

Katie Harmon-Mclaughlin 41:58

Thanks, Carla.

Josh Mangelson 42:07

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