

# Spiritual Practice

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The phrase “spiritual practice” use to raise a number of not-altogether-positive emotions in me. Since joining Unity, I’ve experienced various spiritual practice fads broken up by stretches of apathy. I’m sure at least a few members of Young Adult Group can relate. Daily yoga seemed great for two weeks or so, but then I started to lose focus and wonder what all this practicing was really doing for me anyway.

Our discussion on spiritual practice reframed my whole approach. Instead of asking the utilitarian question of what our spiritual practices could *do for* us, our group discussed instead asking what our spiritual practices *ask of* us.

When I ask what my spiritual practice is *doing for* me, I come up with answers like “to help me focus on the things that are really important to me,” “to bring me peace,” and “to bring about new ways of understanding myself and the world.” I was therefore expecting that every time I did my spiritual practice, I would have a spiritual experience and thought that if I didn’t, it was evidence that I was doing it wrong.

When I ask what my spiritual practice is *asking of* me, though, I come up with answers like vulnerability, creativity (to alter my practice so that it feels more authentic), attention to my body and emotions, discipline, connection to others by broadening my sense of concern, and trust that the practice is valuable even at the times when there doesn’t seem to be any immediate results.

I could just as easily rename this practice of trust as the practice of hope, in the way that one of my former professors practiced hope – not as a “backseat optimist,” but like a driver who is so determined to get someplace that the relative likelihood of getting there isn’t even a part of the conversation. My professor lived out his hope through acts of radical generosity that, at first glance, seem like they’d just never be worth the effort. Things like having his students keep journals for class and writing notes in response to each one every single week. I wonder if he had been asking what reading all those journals would do for him or his students or the world, would he have given it up before he even started?

Using the “ask of” instead of “do for” framework has left me feeling lighter and more able to focus on and find meaning in my practice. I’m excited for more opportunities to use this framework in future discussions at Young Adult Group. What do our relationships with friends and family ask of us? What does Young Adult Group ask of us? What does being a part of Unity Church ask of us?