

"God's life and kingdom surround us on every side. But how do we find this reality and derive our life from God's—like a branch does from the vine? In *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, Tish Harrison Warren reveals simple, grounded, and beautifully repetitive practices in the small things of our workaday lives and the rhythms of liturgy. Tish gets it. If you let her be your guide, you too will get it: a life in God in your everyday life."

Todd Hunter, bishop, Anglican Church in North America,  
author of *Growing Church Another Chance*

"*Liturgy of the Ordinary* is a baptism of vision. Tish Harrison Warren warmly and wisely helps us find God in the strangest of places: standing at the sink, sitting in traffic, stooping to make a bed. As it turns out, our everyday habits are imbued with the holy possibility of becoming new people in Christ."

Jen Pollock Michel, author of *Teach Us to Want*

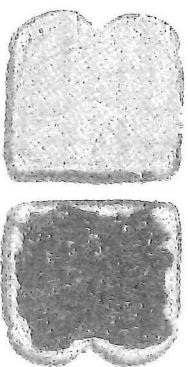
"Tish Harrison Warren is both a priest and a mother who changes poopy diapers. She embodies the high calling of the church and the high calling of the home and in those dual vocations has written a book of tremendous importance. . . . Tish writes with candor, insight, and intelligence about the sacredness of quotidian living. The highest compliment I can offer is that her book inspired me to go back to my dirty sink and my screaming kids with a renewed sense of purpose."

Andrea Palpant Dilley, contributing editor, *Christianity Today*

"Sunday liturgy shapes our faith through its mix of prayers, songs, Scriptures, and sermons. We hear from and are shaped by God through these practices. Under Tish Harrison Warren's insightful gaze, our seemingly 'boiling' daily routines become a liturgy of their own—calling us to confession and community, Scripture and Sabbath, baptism and embodiment. Some spiritual directors listen for God's invitations in our prayers. Tish discerns God's invitations in our everyday life. She reminds us that God intends to speak, to invite, and to transform us in every situation we find ourselves in. Tish confronts us with the reality that God will not be confined to 1.5 hours on a Sunday. She is the prophet and pastor that our churches desperately need. At least this harried working dad needs her voice. I am approaching the daily routines of housework and homemaking with my wife and kids with newfound expectation and hope."

Gregory Jao, vice president and director of campus engagement,  
InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

# liturgy of the ordinary



**sacred practices  
in everyday life**

**Tish Harrison Warren**  
Foreword by Andy Crouch

**IVP Books**  
An imprint of InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois

If I am to spend my whole life being transformed by the good news of Jesus, I must learn how grand, sweeping truths—doctrine, theology, ecclesiology, Christology—rub against the texture of an average day. How I spend this ordinary day in Christ is how I will spend my Christian life.

2

## making the bed



### liturgy, ritual, and what forms a life

A few years ago, right before Lent, I became curious about bed making. Specifically, it occurred to me that thousands, perhaps even millions, of adults make their beds—a shocking idea to me, because I almost never did.

I had assumed that most people, outside of a small group of elite Pinterest-perfect superhumans, didn't make their beds unless they were hosting a party or their mom was visiting. I know that for bed-making devotees this is hard to fathom, but in my mind bed making was something we all collectively shed as soon as we could, like wearing a retainer or doing algebra homework.

What was the point? You'd mess it up again that evening. It is a Sisyphean exercise. Make the bed, unmake it, make it again, over and over. And for what? The dishes must be washed so you can reuse them; the laundry must be done so you have clean clothes (although I stretch that as far as I can). But the bed functions just

as well with the sheets messy as it does with them pulled tight and tucked in neatly. Don't get me wrong—I enjoyed the feeling of crawling into a made bed, especially with freshly cleaned sheets, but not so much that I actually considered making it.

Out of my newfound curiosity, I asked a close friend whether she made her bed. She did. Not daily, but more often than not, and funnily enough she usually did it in the evening, right before she crawled in. Well, that made no sense and totally intrigued me. So I took to Facebook and did an informal survey, asking who made their bed and how often. People responded—lots of people—with surprising passion.

Some made it daily, first thing, zealously. Some never made it. Some thought it was preposterous to even consider making it, while others thought not making the bed was akin to not brushing your teeth or not paying your taxes—something meriting disgust, if not jail time. Many made their bed erratically, maybe three out of seven days. A shocking number made their bed at night. Some promised me that bed making would change my life—that I'd be more successful, happy, and productive with a made bed.



At that time, my typical morning routine was that shortly after waking, I'd grab my smartphone. Like digital caffeine, it would prod my foggy brain into coherence and activity. Before getting out of bed, I'd check my email, scroll through the news, glance at Facebook or Twitter.

If humans rescue a baby animal in the wild, the animal is said to be "imprinted." It accepts the human as its mother. From that point on, it will believe that all good things come from people. It is no longer wild and it cannot live on its own. The nature center in my town

houses imprinted animals—baby mountain lions, raccoons, and porcupines who rely on humans for food, water, shelter, and protection.

My morning smartphone ritual was brief—no more than five or ten minutes. But I was imprinted. My day was imprinted by technology. And like a mountain lion cub attached to her humans, I'd look for all good things to come from glowing screens.

**Without realizing it, I had slowly built a habit:  
a steady resistance to and dread of boredom.**

Technology began to fill every empty moment in the day. Just before breakfast, I'd quickly scroll through email, Facebook, Twitter, a blog. And then again an hour later. I'd ignore my kids' persistent calls for milk and snacks with a distracted "hold on" as I vaguely skimmed an article. I'd sneak in five minutes online as they ate lunch. I'd return from an errand and sit in the driveway with the car running, scrolling through news on my phone, and then I'd check my screen again before bedtime. Throughout the day I fed on a near-constant stream of news, entertainment, stimulation, likes, and retweets. Without realizing it, I had slowly built a habit: a steady resistance to and dread of boredom.



After my makeshift sociological study on bed making, I decided that for Lent that year I'd exchange routines: I'd stop waking up with my phone, and instead I'd make the bed, first thing. I also decided to spend the first few minutes after I made the bed sitting (on my freshly made bed) in silence. So I banished my smartphone from the bedroom.

My new Lenten routine didn't make me wildly successful or cheerfully buoyant as some had promised, but I began to notice,

very subtly, that my day was imprinted differently. The first activity of my day, the first move I made, was not that of a consumer, but that of a collaborator with God. Instead of going to a device for a morning fix of instant infotainment, I touched the tangible softness of our well-worn covers, tugged against wrinkled cotton, felt the hard wood beneath my bare feet. In the creation story, God entered chaos and made order and beauty. In making my bed I reflected that creative act in the tiniest, most ordinary way. In my small chaos, I made small order.

And then there was a little space, an ordered rectangle in my messy home. And that rectangle somehow carved out a small ordered space in my messy, distracted mind.

And I sat. At times, I'd read Scripture. Most often I'd pray. I'd begin with the Lord's Prayer. Then I'd invite God into the day. I'd pray the words of the Morning Office: "Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall declare your praise . . ."<sup>11</sup>

I'd lay out my worries, my hopes, and my questions before God, spreading them out in his presence like stretched-out sheets. I'd pray for my work and family, for decisions, for a meeting scheduled later in the day. But mostly, I'd invite God into the day and just sit. Silent. Sort of listening. Sort of just sitting.

But I sat expectantly. God made this day. He wrote it and named it and has a purpose in it. Today, he is the maker and giver of all good things. I'd lap up the silence like mother's milk.



Most of our days, and therefore most of our lives, are driven by habit and routine.

Our way of being-in-the-world works its way into us through ritual and repetition. James K. A. Smith explains that a particular

view of "the good life" is ingrained in us through repetitive practices that motivate how we live and what we love.<sup>2</sup>

We are shaped every day, whether we know it or not, by practices—rituals and liturgies that make us who we are. We receive these practices—which are often rote—not only from the church or the Scriptures but from the culture, from the "air around us."

Flannery O'Connor once told a young friend to "push as hard as the age that pushes against you."<sup>3</sup> The church is to be a radically alternative people, marked by the love of the triune God in each area of life. But often we are not sure how to become this sort of alternative people. Though we believe deeply in the gospel, though we put our hope in the resurrection, we often feel like the way we spend our days looks very similar to our unbelieving neighbors—with perhaps a bit of extra spirituality thrown in.

Some Christians seem to think that we push back against the age primarily by believing correctly—by getting the right ideas in our heads or having a biblical worldview. While doctrinal orthodoxy is crucial in the Christian life, for the most part we are not primarily motivated by our conscious thoughts. Most of what we do is precognitive.<sup>4</sup> We do not usually think about our beliefs or worldview as we brush our teeth, go grocery shopping, and drive our cars. Most of what shapes our life and culture works "below the mind"—in our gut, in our loves.<sup>5</sup>

Other Christians have believed that pushing against the age involves a radical rejection of the workaday world. If we can sufficiently separate ourselves from culture, the thinking goes, either by withdrawing from it and rejecting certain sorts of art, music, media, and parts of civic life or, alternatively, by a kind of Christian radicalism—living in alternative communities, forsaking average

careers, going overseas, or intentionally living among the poor—then we will be formed as an alternative people. Though each of these approaches has valuable insight to offer about how to follow Christ in our contemporary culture, they are not enough to form an alternative people in themselves. They teach us to inhabit a specific subculture, rejecting the dominant culture by consuming our own sorts of music, conferences, books, media, celebrities, and lifestyles. While these approaches may form us as alternative consumers, they do not necessarily form us as worshipers.

Whoever we are, whatever we believe, wherever we live, and whatever our consumer preferences may be, we spend our days doing things—we live in routines formed by habits and practices. Smith, following Augustine, argues that to be an alternative people is to be formed differently—to take up practices and habits that aim our love and desire toward God.

We don't wake up daily and form a way of being-in-the-world from scratch, and we don't think our way through every action of our day. We move in patterns that we have set over time, day by day. These habits and practices shape our loves, our desires, and ultimately who we are and what we worship.



In church on Sunday we participate in a liturgy—a ritualized way of worship—that we repeat each week and by which we are transformed. Our Sunday liturgies look different from tradition to tradition. Quakers, Roman Catholics, and Presbyterians worship differently, but within each tradition there are patterns of worship, and through each gathered liturgy congregants are formed in a way of being-in-the-world. Even those traditions that claim to be freeform or nonliturgical include practices and

patterns in worship. Therefore, the question is not whether we have a liturgy. The question is, “What kind of people is our liturgy forming us to be?”

Our Sunday liturgies teach us a particular idea of the good life, and we are sent out into our week as people who bear out that vision in our workaday world.

There is nothing magic about any particular church tradition. Liturgy is never a silver bullet for sinfulness. These “formative practices” have no value outside of the gospel and God’s own initiative and power.<sup>6</sup> But God has loved us and sought us—not only as individuals, but corporately as a people over millennia. As we learn the words, practices, and rhythms of faith hewn by our brothers and sisters throughout history, we learn to live our days in worship.

We have everyday habits—formative practices—that constitute daily liturgies. By reaching for my smartphone every morning, I had developed a ritual that trained me toward a certain end: entertainment and stimulation via technology. Regardless of my professed worldview or particular Christian subculture, my unexamined daily habit was shaping me into a worshiper of glowing screens.

Examining my daily liturgy *as a liturgy*—as something that both revealed and shaped what I love and worship—allowed me to realize that my daily practices were malforming me, making me less alive, less human, less able to give and receive love throughout my day. Changing this ritual allowed me to form a new repetitive and contemplative habit that pointed me toward a different way of being-in-the-world.

Smith asks us to examine our days:

So the question is, are there habits and practices that we acquire without knowing it? Are there ritual forces in our culture that we perhaps naively immerse ourselves in—and are thus formed by—that, when we consider them more closely, are pointed at some ultimate end? Are there mundane routines that we participate in that, if we are attentive, function as thick practices aimed at a particular vision of the good life?<sup>7</sup>

The often unseen and unsung ways we spend our time are what form us. Our mundane moments, rooted in the communal practices of the church, shape us through habit and repetition, moment by passing moment, into people who spend their days and therefore their lives marked by the love of God.

As we walk together through an average day, we will look at these common, often overlooked daily practices as liturgies of the day, liturgies that are utterly intertwined with and transformed by our communal liturgies each Sunday. Some of these, like my smartphone ritual, may need to be changed. As we examine them we realize that we need to make new habits that form us as more faithful worshipers. Some habits may simply need to be examined as the important spiritual practices they are.

I do not expect that as we navigate our day we will consciously think through the theology of each and every habit. That would be exhausting. But whether we examine our daily activities theologically or not, they shape our view of God and ourselves. Examining our daily life through the lens of liturgy allows us to see who these habits are shaping us to be, and the ways we can live as people who have been loved and transformed by God.



My Lenten ritual of making the bed each day and sitting cross-legged in a silent room was a practice that reacquainted me with

the texture of silence and the rhythm of repetition. I need rituals that encourage me to embrace what is repetitive, ancient, and quiet.

But what I crave is novelty and stimulation.

And I am not alone. A fascinating and somewhat disturbing study out of the University of Virginia showed that, given the choice, many preferred undergoing electric shock to sitting alone with their thoughts. Study participants were exposed to a mild shock, which they all reported they didn't like and would pay money not to undergo again. But when left alone in an empty room with a "shocker" button for up to fifteen minutes, removed from all distractions, unable to check their phones or listen to music, two-thirds of men and one-fourth of women in the study chose to voluntarily shock themselves rather than sit in silence. Dr. Tim Wilson, who helped conduct the study, said, "I think this could be why, for many of us, external activities are so appealing, even at the level of the ubiquitous cell phone that so many of us keep consulting. . . . The mind is so prone to want to engage with the world, it will take any opportunity to do so."<sup>8</sup>

The thing that most annoyed me about bed making—the fact that it must be done over and over again—reflects the very rhythm of faith. Our hearts and our loves are shaped by what we do again and again and again. On Sunday in gathered worship, we learn together to sit in repetition and in predictability. We learn the repetitive, slow rhythms of a life of faith.

My Lenten bed making ritual—which has continued for years and is now ingrained—teaches me to slow down, to bravely enter a dull Tuesday morning, to embrace daily life, believing that in these small moments God meets us and brings meaning to our average day. We are not left like Sisyphus, cursed by the gods to a

life of meaninglessness, repeating the same pointless task for eternity. Instead, these small bits of our day are profoundly meaningful because they are the site of our worship. The crucible of our formation is in the monotony of our daily routines.

In a culture that craves the big, the entertaining, the dramatic, and the shocking (sometimes literally), cultivating a life with space for silence and repetition is necessary for sustaining a life of faith.

While my husband, Jonathan, was getting his PhD, he got to know a former Jesuit priest turned married professor—a holy man, a provocateur, and a favorite among his students. Once a student met with him to complain about having to read Augustine's *Confessions*. "It's boring," the student whined. "No, it's not boring," the professor responded. "You're boring."

What Jonathan's professor meant is that when we gaze at the richness of the gospel and the church and find them dull and uninteresting, it's actually we who have been hollowed out. We have lost our capacity to see wonders where true wonders lie. We must be formed as people who are capable of appreciating goodness, truth, and beauty.

**The crucible of our formation is in the anonymous monotony of our daily routines.**

Our worship together as a church forms us in a particular way. We must be shaped into people who value that which gives life, not just what's trendy or loud or exciting. I worry that when our gathered worship looks like a rock show or an entertainment special, we are being formed as consumers—people after a thrill and a rush—when what we need is to learn a way of being-in-the-world

that transforms us, day by day, by the rhythms of repentance and faith. We need to learn the slow habits of loving God and those around us.

Our addiction to stimulation, input, and entertainment empties us out and makes us boring—unable to embrace the ordinary wonders of life in Christ. Kathleen Norris writes,

Like liturgy, the work of cleaning draws much of its meaning and value from repetition, from the fact that it is never completed, but only set aside until the next day. Both liturgy and what is euphemistically termed "domestic" work also have an intense relation with the present moment, a kind of faith in the present that fosters hope and makes life seem possible in the day-to-day.<sup>9</sup>

Daily life, dishes in the sink, children that ask the same questions and want the same stories again and again and again, the long doldrums of the afternoon—these things are filled with repetition. And much of the Christian life is returning over and over to the same work and the same habits of worship. We must contend with the same spiritual struggles again and again. The work of repentance and faith is daily and repetitive. Again and again, we repent and believe.

A sign hangs on the wall in a New Monastic Christian community house: "Everyone wants a revolution. No one wants to do the dishes." I was, and remain, a Christian who longs for revolution, for things to be made new and whole in beautiful and big ways. But what I am slowly seeing is that you can't get to the revolution without learning to do the dishes. The kind of spiritual life and disciplines needed to sustain the Christian life are quiet, repetitive, and ordinary. I often want to skip the boring, daily stuff to get to the thrill of an edgy faith. But it's in the dullness of the Christian

faith—the making the bed, the doing the dishes, the praying for our enemies, the reading the Bible, the quiet, the small—that God’s transformation takes root and grows.

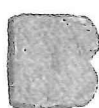


The point of my new morning practice was not to have a magazine-cover bedroom—which in my house, with my domestic and decorating skills, is never going to happen. The point is not that “cleanliness is next to godliness.” There are times when we may need to leave the dishes in the sink and go for a walk or hang out with our friends or play with our kids or take a nap.

The point of exchanging my morning liturgy was to habituate myself to repetition, to the tangible, to the work before me—to train myself, in this tiny way, to live with my eyes open to God’s presence in this ordinary day. I’d cultivated a habit, from the first conscious moments of my day, of being entertained, informed, and stimulated. My brain would dart quickly from stimulus to stimulus, unable to focus, unable to lie fallow. Making my bed and sitting in silence for just a few minutes reminded me that what is most real and significant in my day is not what is loudest, flashiest, or most entertaining. It is in the repetitive and the mundane that I begin to learn to love, to listen, to pay attention to God and to those around me.

I needed to retrain my mind not to bolt at the first sight of boredom or buck against stillness. That took the cultivation of habit. And habits have to start small and to start somewhere—sitting half bored to pray and to listen on sheets tucked in, covers pulled tight.

## brushing teeth



**standing, kneeling, bowing, and living in a body**

So much of life, unavoidably, is just maintenance. Things need upkeep or they fall apart. We spend most of our days and much of our energy simply staving off inevitable entropy and decay.

This is especially true of our bodies.

Our lives are taken up with the care and maintenance of our bodies—we have to clean them, feed them, deal with their wastes, exercise them, and give them rest, again and again, every day. And that’s when we are well and things are running smoothly. Even with all that care, our bodies eventually break down and we get sick, and require even more care. Having a body is a lot of work.

This morning, I brushed my teeth—a mindless habit ingrained in me since before I can remember. I do so morning and night almost every day. I say “almost” because, at times, the sheer necessity of daily teeth brushing leaves me feeling resentful and, like a defiant teenager, I rebel against the system. I do not like