

Opening

Chalice Lighting Words:

By [Lois Van Leer](#)

We light this chalice on the brink of a new year
Letting go of what has been
Open and hopeful for what may come
Renewed, restored, ready
To live Life fully anew
May we move forward with intention.

Checking In: Please share your name, what brought you to Small Group Ministry, and how you hope to benefit from attending.

Introduction to Topic (from “How to 80/20 Your Life”)

In 1906 there was an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto. One day, strolling through his garden, Pareto noticed that every year, 20% of the pea plants in his garden produced approximately 80% of the peas. This got him thinking about economic output on a larger scale. Sure enough, he began to find that in various industries, societies and even companies, 80% of the production often came from the 20% [most productive portion](#).

This became known as the [Pareto Principle](#), or what is now often referred to as the 80/20 Principle.

The 80/20 Principle states that 80% of the output or results will come from 20% of the input or action. While widely used in business, few people traditionally thought to apply the 80/20 Principle to everyday life or the ramifications it could have.

For instance:

- What are the 20% of [your possessions](#) you get the most value out of?
- What do you spend 20% of your time doing that gives you 80% of [your happiness](#)?
- Who are the 20% of people you're close to who [make you the happiest](#)?
- What are the 20% of the clothes you wear 80% of the time?
- What's the 20% of food you eat 80% of the time?

Chances are these are easy questions for you to answer. You've just never considered them before. And once you've answered them, you can easily focus on increasing the efficiencies in your life. For instance, the 80% of [people you spend time with](#) who only add 20% of the pleasure in your life (spend less time with them). The 80% of crap you use 20% of the time ([throw it out or sell it](#)). Obviously, the 80/20 rule is not necessarily a rigid dictum to live by. Not everything will fit so nicely into its nice, neat categorization. But think of it as a tool, a lens to view aspects of your life through.

“Guidelines” for Small Group Ministry:

Before our meetings, we agree to:

- Make meetings a priority, including being on time
- Contact the facilitator(s) ahead of time if we are unable to attend
- Engage the packet ahead of time: reading the material, doing one of the spiritual exercises and identifying which question is “my question.”

During our meetings, we agree to:

- Practice deep listening, offering each other time to share without interruption.
- Honor the rule of “no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight!” during times of discussion and crosstalk.
- Monitor the length and frequency of our own participation so all members have opportunities to speak.
- Speak for ourselves, offering reactions rooted in gratitude and connecting the sharing of others to our own experience.

After our meetings, we agree to:

- Follow up with members who miss a meeting without notice to make sure they are okay.
- Respect the privacy of group members by keeping personal sharing confidential
- Keep each other in our prayers and thoughts, reaching out to each other in tangible ways to ensure that we are a caring community for one another
- Keep a look out for other church members who might benefit from and fit with our group, recognizing that inviting is the job of us all and a way to express our gratitude for the gifts the group has given us.

Our Spiritual Exercises Discussion

Round One “The Sharing Round”: We will go around the circle. Each person will be invited to take 3-5 minutes to share which spiritual exercise you chose to engage in from the participant packet (fill in the blanks with intention, start your day with intention, try to focus on one thing you usually do and accomplish it **without** multitasking, choose your quote and reflect on it). If you were unable to engage in a particular exercise, no problem. We will take a few minutes to choose an exercise from pages 3-9 and reflect on it before the round begins.

Round Two “The Response Round”: The floor is now open for each participant to respond once to what you’ve heard. When responding, please use the practice of “holding up, holding out.” Share gratitude for one person’s sharing which particularly impacted you (holding up), then share how that person’s sharing reconnected you to an important memory or piece of wisdom (holding out the gift you received as you listened to others).

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Filling In The Blanks With Intention

It's not easy to stay true to your deepest intentions. But often it's even harder to figure out what they are. This exercise assumes that our deepest self already knows our core intentions and our work is to decipher what it wants us to hear. To help, you are invited to complete the following page. It contains uncompleted sentences. Fill them in, then step back and see if you notice any patterns or surprises in them. When filling in the blanks, trust your instincts. In other words, don't spend a lot of time pondering what to put in the blank. Instead just write down the first or second thing that pops in your head. Think of it as a Rorschach test on intention.

After you complete the sentences on the following page, use these questions to help you reflect on the answers you wrote in the blanks:

- What would you change after giving the completed sentences a second look?
- What surprises you?
- Would your closest friend or partner agree with how you filled in the blanks? (Maybe even ask them!)
- What 2 or 3 sentences seem to merit your greatest attention right now?
- What single intention are you ready to make based on listening deeply to what the list of completed sentences is trying to tell you?

Come to your group ready to share the 2-3 questions that you engaged the most and why that was so. And if you are comfortable, consider telling the group what single intention you set based on the exercise.

Intentional Fill-In The Blanks

1. My most important promise to myself is _____.
2. I will help others by _____.
3. Because of me, my children will understand that _____.
4. I have always wanted to _____.
5. I am on this earth to _____.
6. I will learn more about _____.
7. I am avoiding _____.
8. If I could change one thing about myself it would be _____.
9. At my funeral, the two adjectives I hope people use to describe me are _____ & _____.
10. If I could go back and change one thing about my life it would be _____.
11. If I won a million dollars, the first thing I would do is _____.
12. If I won a free trip, I would fly to _____.
13. When I stop procrastinating, I will _____.
14. I am most happy when I am _____.
15. I want to spend the rest of my life becoming a _____.
16. I want to spend the rest of my life doing _____.
17. Looking back, I realize that I was born to _____.
18. In five years, people will be surprised that I am _____.
19. I have always intended to _____ once I have finished _____.

Option B

Start Your Day with Intention

“Your day is pretty much determined by how you spend your first hour.” - Anon

This exercise invites you to explore the power of intentional mornings. Too often our days take hold of us rather than us taking hold of them. So, for at least one week, pick one of the practices below to begin your day with a greater sense of intentionality and purpose.

Pick A Word

Carve out some time each morning to complete the sentence:

“Today I want to be/feel _____.”

You can do this while you are meditating, brushing your teeth, eating breakfast or walking the dog. Just make enough room to pick *one descriptive word* that you want to walk with throughout your day. So many to pick from: generous, gregarious, powerful, unruffled, trusting, present, nurturing, nurtured, kind. Pull that word into your awareness throughout the day. It helps to literally place it in front of yourself. Write it on a 3*5 card and place it on your desk or put it in your wallet or purse. Maybe even write it on your hand!

Get Grateful

Begin your day with gratitude. So many ways to do this. You can keep it simple by just sitting in silence and pulling into your mind the things you’re looking forward to or the things you are blessed with (your health, a family that loves you, a job you enjoy). One focused way is to start each day by thinking of 2 people in your life that you are grateful for, letting the good energy from those relationships flow into you. Or maybe use a [gratitude jar](#) or write your gratitudes down in a gratitude journal and review its pages as it grows day by day. The point is to replace your to-do list and the morning news with thankfulness as the thing that launches you into the day.

Nourish

This route gives you permission to indulge yourself and give yourself the gift of generosity. It invites you to begin your day with the feeling of being gifted by life, rather than armoring up for the battle of another day. You can keep it very simple. For instance, shower with aromatherapy, treat yourself to a fancy cup of coffee, give yourself an extra 30 minutes to get ready at a slower pace or wake up early enough to see the sunrise. Whatever it is, add something to your morning routine that nourishes you.

Sort

Go ahead and pull out that to-do list and worry list. Write it all down. Then go through it and self-consciously pick the handful of things you will give your attention to and intentionally allow yourself to put the rest into a “parking lot” for some other day. The goal is to narrow the list and achieve a sense of manageability. Sounds simple, but most of us start our days with a hill of worries that just places a shadow over our entire day. End that feeling of “I’ve got too much to do today” and move yourself into the space of “I’ve chosen the things I can and want to do today.”

Sing

That’s right. Get up. Pick a song you love. And do nothing but sing it or sing along with it. Songs have more power than we give them credit for. Don’t underestimate the power of singing as opposed to just listening. When the words come out of your mouth, the music gets more deeply into your body and spirit, enabling the feeling to stay with you and “set the tone” for the entire day.

Walk in Nature

Get out and connect with nature rather than the morning news. Let the smells, sights and weather on your skin remind you of your deeper and wider connections. Begin the morning by reminding yourself that you are more than an employee or a parent. Simply put, begin the day with a wider sense of who you are. Feeling a part of something larger helps you maintain perspective during the day. Feeling connected to the interdependent universe reminds you that you are not alone. Here’s one version of a [walking meditation](#) if you’re looking for some inspiration.

Be Silent

It’s the most basic of spiritual practices: Empty yourself and let yourself sit only with silence and your breath. Here’s a [5-minute breathing meditation](#) and a [TED talk](#) to help you out if you’re new to this practice.

Inspire Yourself

Start your morning off with something that inspires you: a podcast, a poem, an inspirational audio book, a work of art from the internet or simply a quote. We find it so easy to begin our days with what is weighing us down. Why not turn things on their head and start with something that lifts you up?

Think

Did you know that many of the most famous writers, inventors and leaders set aside 2 hours a week to do nothing but sit and think? Sounds odd, right? I mean, when don't we think? The point is that most of the time what we call thinking is really working on a task. Rarely do we let our thoughts wander freely. We are not good at ruminating. So begin your day with some rumination. Sit down with your thoughts and see what *they* want to think about. Do it a little each day or take on the bigger task of finding two whole hours each week of this month. Here's [an article](#) that will convince you that it's worth it.

Meditate and Pray

The classics! If you don't have a daily meditation or prayer practice, use this month to try it on for size. There are lots of resources out there on the web. But the best route is to talk to a friend who regularly meditates or prays and ask them for a bit of guidance and inspiration.

Option C *Just Eat!*

Multitasking is king. All of us do it. It's become a habit. Just the way things are. In other words, we are now multitasking *unintentionally*! So this month, let's intentionally try doing one thing at a time, or as [some people](#) say, let's try *single tasking*! Here's your challenge in a nutshell:

Pick one thing you usually do while multitasking and instead do it, and it alone, each day for a week!

So many options to choose from. The obvious one, of course, is eating. That's right, pick one meal a day and do nothing but eat. No watching TV at the same time. No checking your email as you chomp down. Just intentionally eat and focus on your food. Or maybe narrow it a bit more and single-task with your first cup of coffee or tea each morning. For ten minutes just do nothing but sip. Ten bucks says you will notice the aroma in your nose and heat on your tongue in a way you've not in a long time. Some of us will choose to do a chore without our usual distraction of listening to a podcast while wash the dishes or sweep the floor. Others may apply this practice to our morning commute and just sit and ride. No newspaper reading or headphones in. When you walk the dog, just do that! When you shower, just shower. When you shave, just shave. When you pet your dog, just pet your dog. You get the point. The challenge is picking the one thing you will do each day for a week.

[Researchers](#) say that when we single-task, even for just ten minutes a day, depression decreases and happiness increases. We also [remember](#) and [notice](#) more. In other words, when we intentionally focus on what we are doing, our lives don't just become happier, they become richer. Not a bad deal for ten minutes a day!

Option D

Which Quote is Yours?

In the Companion Pieces section below, there are many quotes about the practice of living with intention. Engaging these quotes and finding *the one* that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, as your spiritual exercise for this month, reflect on those quotes until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of living with intention.

After you've found it, consider writing it out on a small piece of paper and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Wise Words

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.

Parker J. Palmer

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

Viktor E. Frankl

In any given moment we have two options, to step forward in growth or to step back into safety.

Abraham Maslow

Intentional living is the art of making our own choices before others' choices make us.

Richie Norton

Those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it.

Rick Warren

I had at least begun to guess that my greatest need might be to let go and be free from the drive after achievement — if only I dared. I had also guessed that perhaps when I had let these go, then I might be free to become aware of some other purpose that was more fundamental, not self-imposed private ambitions but something which grew out of the essence of one's own nature. People said: 'Oh, be yourself at all costs.' But I had found that it was not so easy to know just what one's self was. It was far easier to want what other people seemed to want and then imagine that the choice was one's own.

Marion Milner, quoted in [A Life of One's Own](#)

I want to stop transforming and just start being.

Ursula Burns

At the center of your being, you have the answer; you know who you are, and you know what you want.

Lao Tzu

With goals, the future is always the focus: Are you going to reach the goal? Will you be happy when you do? What's next? Setting intention, at least according to Buddhist teachings, is quite different than goal making. It is not oriented toward a future outcome. Instead, it is a path or practice that is focused on how you are "being" in the present moment... Goals help you make your place in the world and be an effective person. But being grounded in intention is what provides integrity and unity in your life... What would it be like if you didn't measure the success of your life just by what you get and don't get, but gave equal or greater priority to how aligned you are with your deepest values?

[Phillip Moffitt](#)

Cat: Where are you going?

Alice: Which way should I go?

Cat: That depends on where you are going.

Alice: I don't know.

Cat: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

I always wanted to be somebody, but now I realize I should have been more specific.

Lily Tomlin

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.

Kurt Vonnegut

Conscious change is brought about by the two qualities inherent in consciousness – intention and attention... Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life. Whatever you take your attention away from will wither, disintegrate and disappear.

Deepak Chopra

Habits eat good intentions for breakfast.

John Ortberg

All I know is that my life is better when I assume that people are doing their best. It keeps me out of judgment and lets me focus on what is, and not what should or could be."

Brené Brown

Your Question

Round One “The Sharing Round”: We will again go around the circle. Each person will be invited to take 2-3 minutes to share the question you chose from the Soul Matters packet and how you answered it upon reflection. If you were unable to reflect on a particular question, choose one now and answer it in 2-3 minutes or you may instead choose to “pass.”

Round Two “The Response Round”: The floor is now open for each participant to respond once to what you’ve heard. When responding, please use the practice of “holding up, holding out” that we used in the Spiritual Exercises discussion. Share gratitude for one person’s sharing which particularly impacted you (holding up), then share how that person’s sharing reconnected you to an important memory or piece of wisdom (holding out the gift you received as you listened to others).

1. What did your parents intend to do with their lives? Did they fulfill it? And whether they did or didn’t, what did you learn from watching them try?
2. What is your intention when you wake up? Some begin the day by asking, “What do I have to get done?” Others ask, “What do I want this day to be about?” Which are you?
3. Are you too intentional? Is it time to put down all the “doing” and pay a bit more attention to “being”? Has your long list of intentions left you feeling exhausted and even lost?
4. They say intention arises from within. So, what do you do to stay in touch with the fire in your belly?
5. They say intention takes pause. So, when was the last time you stopped, stepped back and allowed yourself to ask, “Am I going in the right direction?”
6. They say, “Habits eat good intentions for breakfast.” So, what new habit might you put in place that enables your intentions to become real?
7. What if it’s not about what you intend to do with life, but about what life intends to do with you?
8. Have you ever felt that life was living you rather than you living it?
9. Is it finally time to give up that unrealistic intention? The one you’ve failed at following through on again and again? The one you’ve been beating yourself up over, again and again? Is it time to intentionally be gentle with yourself and let it go?
10. Are you as good at assuming the good intentions of others as you are at defending your own?

Closing

Checking Out: How did everyone feel about today's format? Is there anything you would change going forward?

Let's close by each sharing one thing we need most in the coming month to increase our inner peace and act more intentionally, whether it's quiet time to recover from family gatherings and to reflect, meditation, prayer, a trip down Harvey's sledding hill or anything else at all.

Chalice Extinguishing:

By Martha L Munson

We extinguish the chalice here that it might glow gently in our hearts.

May it light your path as you leave this place.

May it guide your way until we are together again.