

I never played basketball growing up. Wrestling and running were the focus throughout high school. However, friends invited me to play in my mid thirties, and what followed was a *very* unorthodox expression of all the fundamentals of this great game. The jump shot was more of a push. Dribbling was uneven and awkward. While “seeing” the floor was critical to the game, my incarnation of this reality took on a much more literal rendering, constantly staring at the floor rather than seeing anything! Nonetheless, the worst part of my game was the pick-and-roll. I understood the concept: use your body to block an opponent, and then turn toward the basket to receive a pass from a teammate who is now double-teamed, while the “roller” is open. It goes without saying that I am profoundly aware of how the practice of this action in one’s youth, makes it second nature. Starting later in life makes it so difficult to perform. I find myself standing in the “pick” position saying to myself, “You really need to roll. . . NOW!”

This feature of basketball has a great deal in common with religious and spiritual practices. When it comes to prayer, worship, meditation, and the practices of following the better angels of our nature, the idea that they should be innate to our being and accessible whenever we desire them is almost laughable. Indeed, in the same way that we develop muscle memory as we learn a sport or play an instrument, so too is there a learning process and development of a spiritual practice over time that takes work. Might we say that we need to practice our practice? Yet, in the world of religion, it is not so much that practice makes perfect. Rather, practice allows us to enter more fully into the richness that such activities can help manifest in our life.

To that end, the Episcopal Church has developed a program that they entitle *The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life*. The elements included in the Way are: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, Rest. (You can view an introduction to the program that the Church has developed here: <https://youtu.be/XzIx0nM5OEK>.) We will focus on each one of these elements in various ways over the course of the program year. I invite you to consciously consider these aspects of our life in faith and our life together. Again, we don’t simply arrive with a complete practice. Literally, we need to practice so that our practice grows and develops.

So, the first feature to consider in this Way of Love is: Turn. Thus, the pick-and-roll scenario is an apt image for this practice of ours. In the same way that I struggle to turn naturally into the roll, I suspect that we all have a difficult time recognizing the need to turn or what it is that we should be turning from or turning toward. Implicit in the “turn” is the sense that we need to change. Things are not sustainable where we find ourselves. We recognize that we can’t continue with the way things are in our life. There is something more. Or, perhaps, we trust that there must be a better way to live. And while we may understand these ideas intellectually, sometimes it is so difficult to live into them. Indeed, the term that psychologists use of a *familiar emotional surround* hints at how easy it is to be lulled into a way of being or place in life. We

can become so familiar with that particular surround that we won't let go of it, regardless of how problematic or destructive it may be for us.

Thus, turning means a movement away from those actions that draw us from the love of others and of God, a turning away from those things that draw us away from living into the better version of ourselves. While turning means a movement away from something, turning also connotes a movement toward those ways of being that bring us more deeply into who we are and whose we are. But, like everything, we need to practice so that this spiritual muscle memory may develop. Part of the way the church tries to shape such practice is through weekly acknowledgment of our need to turn around. The Greek word *metanoia* is the term that we use for repentance. It literally means to turn around. Furthermore, there are seasons of the church year that ask us to focus more on turning around. Advent and Lent are considered penitential seasons and call us to focus more on turning.

Yet, in the same way that practicing the pick and roll once a week or, perhaps, for five weeks during the year will not make us very proficient, so also our practice of turning in our religious life needs more engagement, exercise, effort. So, in what ways can you bring the practice of turning into your life on a daily basis? Is there something that you can regularize in your daily routine that allows you to bump up against the need to turn? When you turn can you consciously consider what it is that you are turning from and what it is that you are turning toward? Might your spiritual muscle to turn be developed? In the process, might you become more of who God created you to be?

Let's try. Again, practice doesn't make perfect. Practice allows us to participate more fully in the mystery of our being.