

**An Altar in the World**  
**Chapter Two**  
**The Practice of Paying Attention**

This study guide is formatted for a small group gathering. If you choose to use it as a small group leader or as an individual, feel free to adapt it in whatever way seems meaningful to you. Enjoy!

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**Lesson prep:**

Print out homework assignment slips for next week.

**Quotes and ideas worth repeating:**

*Reverence is the recognition of something greater than self-something that is beyond human creation or control, that transcends full human understanding. (examples given: God, birth, death, sex, nature, truth, justice, wisdom)*

*Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart once said he could not define pornography, but he knew it when he saw it. Reverence is a little like that. It is difficult to define, but you know it when you feel it.*

*Classical philosopher Paul Woodruff says: To forget that you are only human, to think you can act like a god-this is the opposite of reverence.*

*An irreverent soul who is unable to feel awe in the presence of things higher than self is also unable to feel respect in the presence of things it sees as lower than self.*

*Reverence can be a pain, but it can also heal.*

**Related Scripture:**

Exodus 3:1-13 Moses and burning bush

1 Kings 19: 1-14 The Lord appears to Elijah

**Introductions:**

If you did the homework assignment and paid attention, what did you notice about yourself or about outside?

If not, name something big or small that amazes you.

**Gathering Activity (optional):**

Have paper and pencils out. Invite people to draw their hands. Be as detailed as possible. Tracing is allowed.

**Reflection/discussion:**

Barbara Brown Taylor's dad had a gun-cleaning ritual. Do you have a cleaning/organizing ritual for something that you respect/love? (your car, your CD/DVD's, your coffee maker, your kitchen spices, your iron skillet, etc)

Do you find reverence is a part of our worship services at FUMC?

What commands our attention? (examples: speedometer, watch, cell phone, mail, email, list of things to do, messes at home)

How do we separate what is urgent from what is important?

Reverence requires a certain pace. Does your lifestyle's pace allow for reverence?

The first time Barbara Brown Taylor drove behind a truck with chickens huddled inside their cages and their feathers glancing off her windshield, she began eating chicken with unprecedented reverence. Think about your last big meal-try to imagine all the effort and work that brought that food to your table. Where was the food grown? Did it have to be delivered? Did someone cut the meat for you or did you buy it whole? Did food require refrigeration to keep from spoiling? Did someone shop or cook for you?

Tell of a time when you thought the ground you were standing on was holy.

**Closing:**

Sing or repeat aloud:

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,  
pure and holy,  
tried and true.  
With thanksgiving,  
I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

**Homework:**

Look for pictures of Jesus this week. Bring in one you like.

And also choose one or both of these assignments:

This week when you say grace before a meal, don't thank only God. Try to include gratitude for all the energy expended during the multiple stages to prepare that food for your table.

This week when you find yourself annoyed by someone, try looking at him/her as a human being instead of an obstacle.

**Materials needed:**

Homework assignment slips

Paper and pencils for drawing hands