

GO ON

Kara Oliver

“In the Habit” session for use with devozine meditations for August 24–31, 2015.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“I’m a writer. I also have the privilege of leading workshops for aspiring writers in Africa. Inspired by Julia Cameron in her book *The Artist’s Way*, we encourage writers to start the practice of ‘morning pages,’ a discipline of writing three handwritten pages every morning. At a workshop in Tanzania this year, one of the teenaged participants enjoyed writing the morning pages each day we were together; but at the end of the workshop, he asked, ‘How long do we keep writing morning pages?’ My answer was, ‘As long as you want to be a writer.’

“But today I might have answered him, ‘Go on. Keep going on.’ As S’ambrosia Wasike challenges us in this week’s devo, the goal is to create a ‘new normal.’ For people who want to become prolific and better writers, the new normal is writing three pages every morning without wondering how long. For Christians who want to grow deeper in faith and *go on* toward perfection, we look at acts of piety and mercy that contribute to our growth and serve others and we add those to our lives, committing to make them part of our new normal.

“When have you gone on to create a new normal? What prompted you? What motivated you to stick with it? Pray for those in your group who are ready to commit—or to renew their commitment—to a new normal.” —Kara

MEET THE WRITER

Kara Oliver works at Discipleship Resources, International (Disciples Ministries of The United Methodist Church), training writers and supporting publishing teams in Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. She also celebrates the publication of her new book, *Passing It On: How to Nurture Your Children’s Faith Season by Season* by Upper Room Books in August 2015 (<http://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/1497/passing-it-on.aspx>). Practicing yoga has become her new normal. Find out more about Kara at <http://www.karalassenoliver.com>.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint or white board
- markers
- paper and pens
- Bibles
- copies of the July/August 2015 issue of **devozine**

PLUGGED IN

- + **Youth 2015** — Visit the site for this United Methodist youth event to build on your group's experience (<http://youth2015.com> — download GO ON Beyond post-event resource) or to read more about this week's "GO ON" theme (<http://youth2015.com/theme/>).
- + **"Write 'Morning Pages' by Hand Every Day to Boost Productivity"** — Julia Cameron talks about morning pages. Encourage your group members to write about the new normal they are trying to live into. (<http://lifehacker.com/write-morning-pages-by-hand-every-day-to-boost-productivity-1623157620>)

CHECKING IN

Begin by asking each person in the group to remember the largest group event he or she has been part of—for example: a class trip, a concert, a worship service, a youth event, a political rally, or a sporting event. Encourage everyone to remember how he or she felt being part of the event.

What was the atmosphere like? Was it high energy or low energy? united or divided?

How did you feel? Were you excited or nervous? inspired or bored?

What was the purpose of the event? Was it education or fun? action or entertainment?

Invite volunteers to tell the group briefly about the event they remember. (*If members of your group attended Youth 2015 in Orlando, Florida, this summer, encourage them to talk about that event and how they felt inspired, motivated, and unified as United Methodist youth.*)

Then ask these questions:

Were you asked to go on and do something after the event?

Were you invited to attend another event? Were you asked to report on the experience?

Were you challenged to make a commitment to act or to live differently?

Discuss:

What is it like to be a part of something bigger than yourself?

What would it be like if large groups of young people were organized, motivated, and inspired to go on and live differently?

Who or what inspires young people? Do celebrities? Does education or marketing?

Who or what inspires you?

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Hebrews 6:1, Romans 12:11

Ask volunteers to read aloud Hebrews 6:1 in several translations (NIV, NRSV, NKJV, CEB, CEV, MSG, and so on). Then ask the group to discuss or even to debate these questions:

What is the goal for which Christians are striving?

Is it attainable in this life? Why or why not?

What examples from scripture or from your experience lead you to believe that perfection and maturity in faith are possible?

Next say, *"People of every religion, denomination, or philosophy believe that certain attitudes or actions enable believers to go forward on the path toward God. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed that people should be methodical in practicing both individual and communal acts of piety and mercy. Let's draw a table to help us understand these concepts."*

Draw on newsprint or a white board the table below. Choose from the examples listed below the table to explain the difference between *piety* and *mercy*, *individual* and *communal*. Then ask group members to brainstorm and to come up with other examples. Ask where on the table they would list the new examples.

	INDIVIDUAL things you can do on your own	COMMUNAL things you have to do with others
ACTS OF PIETY personal holiness		
ACTS OF MERCY social holiness		

INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF PIETY

- Read the scriptures
- Meditate on the scriptures
- Study the scriptures
- Pray
- Fast
- Worship
- Live healthy lives
- Share faith with others

COMMUNAL ACTS OF PIETY

- Communion
- Baptisms
- Christian Conferencing (accountability or small groups)
- Bible study
- Worship

INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF MERCY

- Do good works
- Visit the sick
- Visit prisoners
- Feed the hungry
- Give generously to the needs of others

COMMUNAL ACTS OF MERCY

- Seek justice
- End oppression
- End discrimination
- Address the needs of the poor

After the group has completed the table, ask a volunteer to read Romans 12:11 (CEB):
“Don’t hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord!”

Invite everyone to turn to the devo on page 64 in **devozine** and to discover how S’ambrosia Wasike has chosen to keep the fire burning. Explain that each person’s journey of discipleship is unique and that each person must find the acts of piety and mercy that help him or her stay enthusiastic on the journey.

Ask everyone to pair up with another person to discuss these questions:

What is one thing you learned or enjoyed at Youth 2015 or at another event that has stuck with you?

How can you incorporate what you learned into your life? How can you make it part of your new normal? Could you read the Bible every morning, tutor once a month, fast from technology once a week, or volunteer at a soup kitchen every month?

SHARING IN PRAYER

Open this time of prayer with one of the two options below (depending on whether or not your group members attended Youth 2015), and then continue with the writing, sharing, and blessing of the group’s GO ON commitments.

> *If your group attended Youth 2015:*

Group members will remember that at the end of the event, participants were challenged to return to their home churches, full of passion and ideas to live out their faith—to GO ON in new ways. Now that you are two months beyond the event, encourage the group to evaluate their GO ON commitment:

What GO ON commitment did our group make?

What steps have we taken toward meeting our commitment? What are our next steps?

How have we explained our GO ON commitment to the church or the community? Do we want to ask for support? for prayers? for ideas? for help?

If we have gotten off track with the commitment we made, are there things we need to rethink, add, or change? What do we need to do to renew our commitment to GO ON?

How can we celebrate the ways we are living out our faith with passion?

> *If your group did not attend Youth 2015:*

During this session, challenge your group to make a commitment to GO ON—to live out their faith in ways that they want to become the “new normal” for them. Use the questions below, (plus some of your own) to help the group commit to practice—individually or together—particular acts of piety and mercy in the days and months ahead.

What is one thing you would like to see our group commit to do or to practice in the next month? in the next year? (Record on newsprint or a white board the ideas that arise, and invite group members to pick one or two to follow through on as their GO ON commitment.)

What steps do we need to take to get started? Who is responsible for each step?

How will we tell our church members about our GO ON commitment? Do we want to ask them for support? for prayers? for ideas? for help?

When and how will we evaluate the progress we have made on our commitment?

How will we celebrate the ways we are living out our faith with passion?

Distribute sheets of paper and markers. Ask each person to draw an arrow on the sheet of paper and to write the words “GO ON” somewhere across the page.

Invite group members to spend some time in silence, praying about what they want to be the “new normal” for their lives—the ways in which they will begin or continue to practice acts of piety and mercy in order to GO ON to a deeper relationship with Christ and to live out their faith with passion.

Allow 3–5 minutes of silence. Then invite group members to spend another minute or two in silence as they write their commitments on the paper as well. (NOTE: During the silence, write these words on newsprint or a white board: “We have learned about God and about ourselves. Now we go on to serve others, to be disciples of Christ who can change the world.”)

When everyone is finished, ask volunteers to tell the group about their commitments. Then invite group members to pray together the words you have written on the newsprint. Conclude this time of prayer by saying, “*GO ON to be God’s disciples in the world.*”

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Commit to checking in with the group each month about how each of you is living up to your group and individual commitments. Celebrate and offer encouragement and grace for the ways each person strives to deepen his or her discipleship.
- Encourage members of your group to write about their personal goals and about the acts of piety and mercy they are practicing. Keep journals in your gathering space so that individuals can write each week before the group session begins.
- Provide an opportunity each month for your group to GO ON together, alternating between acts of piety and acts of mercy.

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