

A Week of Wesleyan Liturgies

As Wesleyan lore goes, an alumna was leisurely meandering through the dining hall at the University of Georgia, filling her plate with tasty food from a variety of stations. As she reached across the salad bar to scoop a few more cucumbers onto her pile of leafy spinach, she felt another body hovering near her personal space. Senses alert, she heard a low, raspy voice right next to her ear. "The earth is the Lord's," the voice whispered, and without batting an eyelash, the alumna continued "...and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." She turned around, pleased to see a fellow Wolf, and fell into a fit of giggles about how instinctive the complete recitation of Psalm 24 is for Wesleyan graduates.

Liturgies are formational, repeated practices or rituals, and the liturgies that we repeat do indeed become instincts. These instincts shape our values, relationships, and goals. What can sometimes feel like monotony or strict adherence to a routine can also become the voice that steadies us when we experience the world around us shaking. These liturgies can drive our feet forward when the unexpected threatens to stop us in our tracks. These habits can ground us in what is most important.

While the ordinary habits of a school week can quickly become just that – habits – we also believe that the habits of a routine week at Wesleyan are carefully crafted to point students to Jesus, to cultivate fellowship and community, and to stretch the academic potential of our students. Welcome to a sampling of a week of Wesleyan liturgies.



MONDAY



□ *early morning*

The sleepy lower school student tumbles out of the car with a twisted backpack strap and a few stray hairs poking out of her ponytail. Still half asleep, she is greeted warmly with a smile and by name by a lower school teacher. "I know my own and my own know me," says Jesus in John 10, and we aim to imitate Christ by reminding our students that they are uniquely valued in our Wesleyan community. Belonging is a precursor to student wellness and success.

□ *mid-morning*

High school students and teachers gather in Austin Chapel for weekly announcements highlighted by goofy skits and silly games. Led by student government, Monday Morning Meetings break down barriers between grade levels and between students and faculty. The assemblies emphasize the beautiful collegiality of school.

□ *early afternoon*

"Hands on top," she calls, and students sing back, "everybody stop," while they place their hands on their heads. As Brittany Stevens '13, middle school English and Bible teacher, commands the attention of her fifth grade students, the chatter of group projects settles immediately, and students quickly make eye contact with Stevens. More than just a classroom management tool though, the routine helps students build the habit of dignifying and respecting their peers and adults by looking up from their screens.

□ *late afternoon*

There are no fans in sight, yet applause erupts from the Hoyt Family Athletic Complex. The applause unifies into a rowdy chant as the cross country team celebrates the latest "runner of the week." Not to be confused with an award for the fastest runner on the team, the "runner of the week" award recognizes hard work, teamwork, and growth. More than we desire fast times or even a love for the sport, we hope that the runners will carry these more enduring values with them and seek out opportunities to celebrate others.



TUESDAY

□ *mid-morning*

Toes tap and hips wiggle as lower school students bounce in the rhythm guided by Lisa McNearney, lower school music teacher. Music class always opens with a preview of the upcoming chapel songs so that children can confidently sing along. "Corporate worship creates a sense of belonging," explains McNearney. "Sometimes these young students do not even realize the power of the sense of community that they are creating." In both song and word, student voices can glorify God, but like all habits, this worship takes practice.



□ *late morning*

Twenty minutes intentionally set aside. Twenty minutes to connect, to encourage, to challenge, to serve, and to grow together. High school mentor groups partner faculty and staff with small groups of students to share highs and lows, to giggle together, and to process some of the "tough stuff" of high school. By carving out twenty minutes of the school day to prioritize relationships, we hope to model how to resist the temptation to view life merely as a rat race. Relationships last longer than the disappointing quiz grade.

□ *afternoon*

Before lower school students trickle out of Warren Hall and into their parent's car, enrichment class, or after care, their oversized backpacks have been carefully packed with homework, school supplies, and the renowned Tuesday folder. Filled with graded schoolwork, calendars, and flyers, Tuesday folders serve as an invitation for parents to join us in the education of their children.



W E D N E S D A Y

□ *early morning*

While students enjoy an extra hour of sleep or a breakfast date with a parent, thanks to a delayed start on Wednesdays, faculty and staff gather for teamwork, prayer, and fellowship. Thoughtfully cadenced meetings rotate between full faculty and staff worship, division meetings, academic department meetings, and topical professional development. What's so special about a meeting? While teachers steward their own creativity and autonomy in their individual classrooms, we also believe that "iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another," (Proverbs 27:17), so we build in time and space for faculty to collaborate with one another without compromising availability for extracurricular involvement after school.



□ *morning*

Starting with Wednesday morning chapel as a lower school student and progressing to Thursday morning chapel as a middle and high school student, every Wesleyan chapel includes the familiar rhythm of Psalm 24. The Wesleyan evergreen graduates with an average of 490 recitations of Psalm 24, and each change in inflection or heightened emphasis feels as engrained as the creases on the palms of their hands. Students learn not just the content of Psalm 24 – who God is, what He has done for us, and what He calls us to – but also the value of having God's word written on their hearts.



□ *afternoon*

Ninth graders scurry from class to class, and eventually they land in the Old Testament class taught by Josh Tolman '10, high school Bible teacher. Tolman greets the students with "Shalom!" meaning "peace." "Shalom!" the students respond, as they stand to recite, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," (Deuteronomy 6:4). Tolman uses this practice as an opportunity for students to mentally "dial in" to class and shift their focus from previous classes to the current task at hand. A laundry list of priorities will continue to fight for our students' attention, so we build habits of focus.

THURSDAY

□ *early morning*

Squeals and giggles echo through quiet hallways as dozens of middle school students gather before school for gender-specific, grade-level Bible studies. Sixth grade girls dive into donut holes for a quick sugar rush before a group discussion led by Laura Siron, girls sixth grade chair, and Uta Nelson, middle school French and Spanish teacher. Co-led by high school volunteers, their study is built around Barbour Staff's *3-Minute Devotions for Girls*, which offers age-appropriate devotions to build the habit of studying God's word. Thursday morning Bible studies emphasize two formational routines – the importance of building habits of personal worship and the significance of gathering together to learn from and with other believers.

□ *mid-morning*

Joseph Antonio, middle school principal, strides to the podium in Austin Chapel. With an ear-to-ear grin, he calls to the students, and their joyful response reverberates among the pews –

Mr. A: Happy Thursday, everybody!

Students: Happy Thursday, Mr. A! It's a great day to be alive!

Mr. A: This is the day that the Lord has made.

Students: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

As they recite the excerpt from Psalm 118, students cannot help but catch Antonio's contagious enthusiasm and his zeal for each day. The familiar routine grounds students in the truth that every day God is sovereign and generous to us.

□ *late morning*

After middle school students have filed out of Austin Chapel and high school students have filled the pews for student-led worship and a message, high school chapel concludes with a benediction. Students rise to their feet and open their palms to receive a blessing and charge from a teacher. They are encouraged to meditate on the day's chapel and reflect on how to implement wisdom gleaned from the message. The benediction is a live encounter with the reality that their teachers are praying for them daily.

□ *evening*

Wesleyan plans quarterly Family Nights to give the community an evening to spend time as a family without schoolwork and events encroaching on that time. No homework is due, and no assessments are scheduled on the day following Family Nights. This practice encourages families to cultivate the practice of making space for uninterrupted time together.



FRIDAY



□ *morning*

As middle and high school students begin the final day of the school week, the school day does not open with first period. Wesleyan's rotational, seven-period schedule means that each class meets at a different time of day as the week progresses. The rotational schedule helps to evenly spread out the sleepiness of morning classes and energy of classes immediately following lunch. As students catch on to the schedule and begin to recognize their own circadian rhythms and learning preferences, they can plan accordingly.

□ *afternoon*

With the school week winding down, energy rises in Warren Hall. Lower school students begin to eye the clock, perhaps daydreaming about their weekend plans. Following a quick dance break, Acacia Kelly, fourth grade teacher, sings to her students, "silly to serious," and they all respond "just like that," in a rhythm that mimics a popular song released in 2003. Similar to Stevens', Tolman's, and Antonio's call and response routines, Kelly's routine is more than just a way to get students' attention. It is a way to practice focus and engagement, habits that serve them beyond the classroom too.

□ *evening*

After the final bell rings and perhaps an afternoon treat, many Wesleyan students and families make their way back to campus to tailgate for the Wolves home football game. Streamers and balloons decorate tents, and tables overflow with snacks, but if you ask a parent why she is there, her response might be simple – to spend time with friends. We will cheer on the Wolves, "stand up and lean" with the cheerleaders, and clap to the band, and we will do so side-by-side with friends who have become family.



Each of these liturgies requires practice and discipline, and much like prayer or studying God's word are disciplines, so are eye contact, engagement, and gratitude. Director of Christian Life Greg Lisson explains liturgy this way: "Our habits shape our desires. Our desires shape our loves. And our loves shape who we are."

We see that how we spend our time and how we speak reflects what we value, so it is our hope that time spent at Wesleyan cultivates strong personal values. ■