

Spiritual Practices Resource



Adapted from:

“Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth” by Richard J. Foster

“Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us” by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

“50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times” by Teresa A. Blythe

“Faithful Families: Creating Sacred Moments at Home” by Traci Smith

How to Use this Booklet

People often use Lent as a time to evaluate and reenergize their spiritual life. To that end many people practice a fast or add a spiritual practice to their daily routine. However, sometimes we do not know what to do or how to do it. This resource provides instructions on how to practice several spiritual disciplines. It is intended as a tool that will allow you to explore different practices you might not be familiar with.

The goal is to grow in your relationship with God. Do not think of these practices as a checklist, but rather as techniques to open ourselves to the divine. Therefore, do not feel obligated to do all of the practices. Some you will find beneficial while others you will not. Ultimately, this is merely a resource rather than an obligation.

Pick one or several practice to try during Lent and use the instructions in this resource to help as you attempt to make it part of your life. Incorporating something new into your established routine can be challenging. However, with regular repetition and practice you can enrich your spiritual life through one of these, or other, spiritual practices.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice from the Christian monastic tradition. Its title derives from the Latin words meaning reading and divine/holy (a divine reading). In Lectio Divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Lectio Divina can be practiced both by individuals and in groups.

Instructions:

- ***Silencio (preparation)***: Pick a passage of scripture that focuses on what you want to pray about. Find a quiet place to pray where you won't be distracted or interrupted. Take whatever posture allows you to be most comfortable and able to focus on listening. Once you've found a place to pray, take a moment to merely rest, relaxing in God's presence. With each breath, become more aware of God's love. Say a simple prayer offering this time to God and welcoming whatever the Holy Spirit has for you.
- ***Lectio (read)***: Read the passage slowly and carefully to get oriented to the text, getting detail without thinking too much about the meaning. Imagine the time of day, season of year, smells, sounds, touch, colors – all the elements that would make this scene real to you. Take note of words or phrases that stand out to you.
- ***Meditatio (meditate)***: Read the scripture again. Why is there a record of this event? What is the significance of this passage in the larger scheme of things? What does this passage mean? How does it affect an understand of God? Of life? Do you see yourself in any of the characters in the passage? What is this passage trying to say to you?
- ***Oratio (respond)***: Read the passage again slowly and allow your feelings to surface. Are you happy, sad, angry, or guilty? Silently or verbally talk this through with God. Tell God what you feel. Comment about anything in the passage that caught your attention. Dialogue with God truthfully and authentically.
- ***Contemplatio (contemplation)***: Sit quietly with your eyes closes, breathe deeply, and let your mind go blank. Simply rest in the presence of God. Lay down all the insights, words, and images you've encountered and simply dwell in the presence of God. Close with a prayer thanking God for God's willingness to open Scripture up for us to better understand and apply to our lives.

Scripture Suggestions: Matthew 6:25-33, Mark 10:46-52, Psalm 46, 2 Kings 6:8-17, Psalm 23, Mark 4:53-41, Exodus 3:11-14, Matthew 5:14-16, Acts 2:1-13, John 1:1-15

Self-Examination

Self-examination is a spiritual practice that challenges us to take an objective look at our spiritual condition at any given moment. Often we find it's really much easier for us to focus on the character flaws of another, rather than paying attention to and seeing our own. (Luke 6:41-42)

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, developed a method of self-examination as a way for him to consider his own faults. He came up with 22 questions that he asked himself daily during his personal devotion time.

To practice self-examination, set aside time to reflect on the questions below regularly. It might be helpful to create an accountability relationship with another person where you can openly share your answers with each other. Do not use this exercise as a reason for self-hate, but rather as an opportunity to identify areas of growth.

John Wesley's 22 Questions:

1. Am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence?
4. Can I be trusted?
5. Am I imprisoned by dress, friends, work, or habits?
6. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
7. Did the Bible live in me today?
8. Do I give God time to speak to me every day?
9. Am I enjoying prayer?
10. When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
11. Do I pray about the money I spend?
12. Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
13. Do I disobey God in anything?
14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
16. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful?
17. How do I spend my spare time?
18. Am I proud?
19. Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisees who despised the publican?
20. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, resent, or disregard?
21. Do I grumble or complain constantly?
22. Is Christ real in me?

Writing a Psalm

The psalms are among the most human expressions found in the Bible. They give us confidence that no matter what emotion we feel, we can share it with God. In this exercise, you will be asked to think about your deepest longing before God and write your own psalm. This is a heartfelt communication, not an exercise in pretty writing. Before you begin, read a few psalms to get a feel for their passion and authenticity.

Instruction:

- Find a comfortable place to write. Gather writing materials and a Bible.
- Ask God's spirit to enliven you as you search the psalms and create your own.
- First, identify what you would like to express to God. What is your deepest longing right now? What is your truest feeling? Based on what you are feeling read a related psalm from the Bible. Suggested psalms are:
 - Joy – Psalm 11, 18, 23, 27, 33, 84, 87, 103, 112, 122, 150
 - Peace – Psalm 23, 63, 103
 - Love – Psalm 33, 62, 99, 103, 104, 139, 145
 - Gratitude – Psalm 30, 32, 65, 75, 77, 103, 118, 136
 - Fear – Psalm 86, 130, 131
 - Anger – Psalm 55, 58, 94
 - Persecution – Psalm 17, 26, 35, 69, 141
 - Distress – Psalm 29, 42, 44, 71, 88, 109, 113
 - Need for healing – Psalm 22, 38, 41
 - Need for guidance – Psalm 25, 37, 72
 - Need for justice – Psalm 26, 52, 114
 - Need for forgiveness – Psalm 39, 51
- Write a free-form psalm based on your feeling or longing. If you prefer, choose a psalm that expresses some of what you are feeling and rewrite it in your own words. Be as honest with God as the psalmists are.
- Read your psalm aloud to yourself. Pray it. Offer it to God.

Studying Scripture

We often interact with scripture, but to study it takes time and practice. To study is not to acquire knowledge, but to allow the scripture to change us. For this to happen we must set aside time to live with the scripture, allowing us to digest what it wants to tell us. This also requires repetition meaning that this practice requires you to develop a habit of regular study. You must make study a priority so that you can consistently return to the scriptures.

Instructions:

- Make a plan. Pick the places times and dates that you will study throughout Lent. Pick a place and time that will be free from distractions and allow for concentration. Also, decide what you would like to study. Pick a larger book like a gospel, Genesis, or the Psalms and commit to reading a section each study session. Alternatively, you can select a smaller book and commit to reading it in its entirety several times.
- Begin each study session with a prayer asking God to illuminate the text for you, speaking to you through its words. It is advisable to take notes throughout these steps as a way to process and capture what you are experiencing. Therefore, prepare your space by assembling your bible, a notebook, and a pen in a comfortable place where you can both read and write.
- Read the text slowly and deliberately. Notice descriptors, actions, settings, characters, and emotions. Pay attention to the narrative arc of the passage. As you read, try and understand what is happening in the scene. If you are unsure, use reference notes or other material to understand the context and setting of the passage.
- Read the text a second time, considering why the author might have written it. What is the text trying to tell us? What is its purpose?
- Spend several minutes contemplating the meaning of the text. Focus on what the text says, not on what you want it to say. Consider the motivations and desires of the author.
- Only after contemplating the authors intent, read the text a third time and consider what the text means for you. How does this text speak to your life? Do you feel a particular response? How does the message of this text impact the way you live your life?
- Again, spend time simply contemplating the text and how it relates to your life and the world around you.
- Close in prayer, thanking God for the gift of God's revelation.

Prayer of Examen

The prayer of Examen (also known as “examination of consciousness”) has been a regular daily practice for centuries amongst many Christians that allows us to reflect and remember. This practice gives us the space to remember the moments we saw God during the day, where we experienced love and grace, and where we extended that love and grace to others. This practice also gives us the opportunity to reflect on moments that we responded out of brokenness and highlights our need for God’s grace and forgiveness.

Examen can be done alone or in a group setting. To engage this practice, find a comfortable setting that is quiet. Acknowledge that you are in God’s presence, perhaps through a brief prayer or reflecting on a short text like, “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10).

Allow for some silence then begin reflecting on the following questions one at a time allowing for silence and reflection after each question. The silence between each question can be one to several minutes.

Here are some questions to consider. It is not necessary to ask all of them each time.

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

- When did I receive the most love today?
- When did I give the most love today?

- What was the most life-giving part of my day?
- What was the most life-thwarting part of my day?

- When today did I have the deepest sense of connection with God, others, myself, and creation?
- When did I feel the least connected to God, others, myself, and creation?

You can conclude your time with a simple prayer of thanksgiving to God. If you are doing Examen with a group, your time could end with a prayer by the facilitator and a discussion of what God led participants to reflect on.

Praying the Lord's Prayer

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus provides a model of prayer known by many as the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father. This practice uses Jesus' prayer as a guide for our own prayer. The Lord's prayer is traditionally recited with some variations as:

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever. Amen."

This practice requires the use of a timer and will take 7 minutes. You can also adapt this to be used during a prayer walk by dedicating one block for each minute as listed. Structure your prayer as follows:

- Minute 1: Start your time of prayer with one minute of silence. During this time try to clear your mind and simply rest in God's presence.
- Minute 2: During the next minute spend time reflecting on "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Consider God's holiness and mystery. Marvel at God's goodness. Thank God for God's unending love.
- Minute 3: Reflect on the phrase, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Use this time to ask God to reveal God's will. Give God control over areas of your life, allowing God's desires to manifest. Submit yourself to the will of God.
- Minute 4: Reflect on the phrase, "Give us this day our daily bread." What are your needs this day? This is the time to make requests and petition God.
- Minute 5: Reflect on the phrase, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Use this time to ask for forgiveness. How have you wronged God and others? Also, offer forgiveness for those that have wronged you.
- Minute 6: Reflect on the phrase, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." As you have just considered your sins, ask God's help in keeping you from making the same mistakes. Ask God to be your shield, armor, or hedge of protection.
- Minute 7: Spend your final minute in silent reflection. Quiet your mind, allowing a chance for God to respond. This portion can extend longer than one minute if necessary.

Lenten Prayer Time for Families

Instructions:

- At the beginning of Lent, make a list of 40 words that your family will use to anchor your prayer practice. Use the 40 words listed below or think of your own.
- At the start of each day (except Sundays during Lent), take a look at the day's word. Make sure everyone knows what the word is and commits to trying to think about the word throughout the day.
- At the end of the day, gather for prayer time as a family. Review the word and discuss it in one of the following ways:
 - Draw a picture that represents the word.
 - Share a photo you took of something that represents the word.
 - Share what the word means to you, or how it affects you throughout the day.
 - Share how the word might be connected to the Lenten journey.
- Close by thanking God for the word and looking forward to the next day's challenge.

Words:

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| 1. Hope | 21. Despair |
| 2. Strength | 22. Weakness |
| 3. Light | 23. Fire |
| 4. Fear | 24. Walk |
| 5. Love | 25. Crawl |
| 6. Freedom | 26. Run |
| 7. Peace | 27. Purples |
| 8. Quiet | 28. Cross |
| 9. Dark | 29. Grace |
| 10. Cold | 30. Gift |
| 11. Water | 31. Reflection |
| 12. Peace | 32. Remember |
| 13. Witness | 33. Eat |
| 14. Noise | 34. Shadow |
| 15. Desert | 35. Want |
| 16. Kindness | 36. Mercy |
| 17. Friend | 37. Justice |
| 18. Strangers | 38. Lonely |
| 19. Heaven | 39. Silence |
| 20. Wait | 40. Resurrection |