

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

SILENCE, SOLITUDE, AND MEDITATION

We live in a world in which we are judged by what we “DO”. When we ask each other how we are doing our usual response is “I’ve been really busy.” Many times we say this as if it is a badge of honor. Unfortunately, the statement is true. Silence, Solitude and Meditation are not words we are accustomed to in our hurried lives. We all think that they are wonderful things that we hope to do someday, but never really experience. Even when we have some time we fill it with TV, Movies, iPods, iPhones, etc. If we sit still at all we feel that we are unproductive, we feel that we have “wasted” our time.

However, it is during these times that we learn that God’s love for us has little to do with “doing” but is more about “being”. JUST BEING. Most of us are really good at being “HUMAN DOINGS” but really bad at being “HUMAN BEINGS”. All our tasks in life truly boil down to this: “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)

The late author Henri Nouwen writes:

One of the most obvious characteristics of our daily lives is that we are busy. We experience our days as filled with things to do, people to meet, projects to finish, letters to write, calls to make, and appointments to keep. Our lives often seem like over-packed suitcases bursting at the seams. In fact, we are almost always aware of being behind schedule. There is a nagging sense that there are unfinished tasks, unfulfilled promises, and unrealized proposals. There is always something else that we should have remembered, done, or said. There are always people we did not speak to, write to, or visit. Thus, although we are very busy, we also have a lingering feeling of never really fulfilling our obligations.

The strange thing, however, is that it is very hard not to be busy. Being busy has become a status symbol. People expect us to be busy and to have many things on our minds. Often our friends say to us, “I guess you are busy, as usual,” and mean it as a compliment. They reaffirm the general assumption that it is good to be busy. In fact, those who do not know what to do in the near future make their friends nervous. Being busy and being important often seem to mean the same thing. Quite a few telephone calls begin with the remark, “I know you are busy, but do you have a minute?” suggesting that a minute taken from a person whose agenda is filled is worth more than an hour from someone who has little to do.

In our production-oriented society, being busy... has become one of the main ways, if not the main way, of identifying ourselves.

*Sometimes it seems as if our society has become dependent on the maintenance of **this busyness**. What would happen if we stopped **being busy**? If the urge to be entertained so much, to travel so much, to buy so much, **to go out with our friends, talk on the phone,***

*play sports, etc., no longer motivated our behavior, could our society as it is today still function? The tragedy is that we are indeed caught in a web of false expectation and contrived needs. Our **busyness** fills our external and internal lives to the brim. It prevents the Spirit of God from breathing freely in us and thus renewing our lives.*

*One of the most notable characteristics of **being busy** is that it fragments our lives. The many things to do, to think about, to plan for, the many people to remember, to visit, or to talk with, the many causes to attack or defend, all these pull us apart and make us lose our center. **Being busy** causes us to be “all over the place,” but seldom at home. One way to express the spiritual crisis of our time is to say that most of us have an address but cannot be found there. We know where we belong, but we keep being pulled away in many directions, as if we were still homeless. “All these other things” keep demanding our attention. They lead us so far from home that we eventually forget our true address, that is, the place where we can be addressed by God.¹ (Bold mine)*

Perhaps we fear silence and solitude. Maybe we are afraid to hear what God has to say to us. Maybe we are afraid because our identities are tied up in our busyness. But we only find out who we really are in God. Our identities are found only IN HIM. But we will never find out who we are if our lives crowd out God.

SILENCE

- Silence is the practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music.
- Why silence?
 - Because in silence we free ourselves from the addiction to and distraction of noise so we can be totally present to the Lord. So that we can open ourselves to God in the place that is beyond words.
- Listen to these Scriptures:

Habakkuk 2:20

“But oh! God is in His holy Temple! Quiet everyone—a holy silence. Listen!”

1 Kings 19:11-12

[11] The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. [12] After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*. 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 23-37.

Revelation 8:1

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

SOLITUDE

- Solitude is the environment in which we build our relationship with God.
- Solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God.
- **Luke 5:15-16** – Jesus would often (His custom) withdraw from people to be alone with His Father.
 - Jesus NEEDED to have constant fellowship with His Father.
 - The Greek construction here indicates a continual practice that Jesus had. It could also be translated “was regularly withdrawing and praying.”
 - Here we see (as in Mark 1:35) that Jesus would intentionally remove Himself from the crowd to hear His Father’s voice and then obey His Father’s desire to move on and preach the gospel.
 - The increasing crowds and the unceasing demands on Jesus’ time did not deter Jesus from spending extensive times alone with His Father in prayer.
 - It was even in this environment that Jesus found Himself being tempted by Satan. But more on that in a minute.
- We need solitude just like Jesus. We need to withdraw and develop our relationship with the Father. In solitude we leave people and things behind and enter into that relationship alone with God.
 - BUT THIS CAN BE SCARY! It is in this intimate setting that we reveal the depths of our soul to God.
 - Think about it in terms of a budding love relationship. In the beginning, we may begin by going out with other people in a group setting. However, before long there is a desire to meet alone. In that intimate setting is where we learn about one another and begin falling more and more in love.
 - At first, the times together are awkward. We don’t know what to say or how to say it. But before long, we begin to know each other more and more and can talk for hours.
- Henri Nouwen says that

*Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant (“turn stones into loaves”), to be spectacular (“throw yourself down”), and to be powerful (“I will give you all these kingdoms”). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity (“You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone”). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter—the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.*²

² Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 13-14.

- Why don't we enter into solitude? Maybe we don't enter solitude often because we are afraid.
 - Afraid of God finding out what He already knows about us.
 - Afraid we will have to give up too much of ourselves in this relationship.
 - Afraid to discover who we really are and what God wants of us.
- But in solitude, we discover the great encounter with the Lord of the universe and His deep desire to have an intimate relationship with us. What a great God we have who longs to be with us!
- These moments alone with God involve a conversation. Solitude involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is needed to carry out most other spiritual disciplines.
- Why solitude?
 - Because in it we leave people and things behind and enter into time alone with God.
- Listen to these Scriptures:

Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Luke 5:16

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

1 Kings 19:11

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Lament. 3:28

*Let him sit alone in silence,
for the Lord has laid it on him.*

MEDITATION

- Meditation is a long, passionate gaze at God, His work, and His Word. Slowing down and giving one's undivided attention to God lies at the core of Christian meditation.
- Why meditation?
 - Because meditation allows us to deeply gaze upon God and all He does.
- Listen to these Scriptures:

Joshua 1:8

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Psalm 63:6

*If I'm sleepless at midnight,
I spend the hours in grateful reflection.*

Psalm 77:12

*I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished,
and give a long, loving look at your acts.*

Psalm 19:14

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- Get into a comfortable position. Begin to relax your entire body.
- Become aware of all your surroundings. Allow your eyes to receive the light, colors, and shapes around you without seeking to “do” anything with what you see. Just look.
- Now, gently close your eyes and turn your awareness to your ears. Allow yourself to receive the sounds and noises around you without judgment. Even in silence God’s creation continues (your breathing for instance).
- Now, take a moment to become aware of your body. Beginning with the top of your head, allow a gentle attention to move down your body to the soles of your feet. Draw attention to each and every part of your body as you move down. Allow yourself to notice places of tension or pain without passing judgment.
 - Can you compassionately receive your physical self?
- Take a few moments to allow your body, just as it is, to breathe and rest in the presence of God.
- Begin to quietly turn your awareness to the presence of God within all you see, hear and feel. Don’t force anything. Allow yourself to open up to the presence of His Divine Love found in you.
- Read the following very slowly and gently:

Imagine yourself walking down a road. It’s the path of your life. Imagine what the path looks like. Is it curvy? Or straight? Hilly? Flat? Is it wide or narrow, surrounded by trees or by fields? You look down. Is the path rocky? Sandy? Is it dirt? Maybe it’s paved? What does it feel like under your feet? And up ahead, what’s in your path? Does it look clear or are there hurdles in your way?

Something is in your hands. You’ve been carrying it a long time—it’s something you brought with you, in your spirit, to this place. What does it look like? What does it feel like in your hand? Is it hot? Cold? Warm? Is it smooth? Prickly? Sharp? Rough? Is it heavy or light?

Now look up ahead. A figure is moving toward you. You can't quite make out who it is, but he seems to know you and his pace quickens as he recognizes you. Now you can see—it's...Jesus! He's coming closer. What's the expression on his face as he walks toward you? How do you feel? He says a word of greeting to you. What does he say? How do you feel? Do you say anything back?

Now Jesus is standing in front of you. What does he say? Now he's holding his hands out—he wants you to put what's in your hand into his hands. How does it feel as the object leaves your hands? Do you say anything to Jesus?

Now you and Jesus start to walk together—he's holding the object of yours. As the two of you walk along, what do you talk about? Imagine the conversation...³

- Conclude by reciting the following passage 5 times. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10) Each time dwell more in God's presence in the passage. Take in the life-giving words, then close with a prayer.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Now open your eyes and sit up.
- What was the experience like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain silent and still? Why?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like “I'm not doing this right;” “Nothing is happening;” “I hate these kinds of exercises”?
- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Was the time restful or did you become anxious and agitated?
- For most of us it is difficult to stop our activity and simply be present to God. But the more we do it, the more we begin to hear the “gentle whisper” of God in our hearts.

³ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 83-84.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

PRAYER

It is important to understand why committed times of prayer are vital to our spiritual formation and discipleship. Mark 1:35 tells us, *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”* Why? The better question should be, *“Why wouldn’t He?”* It’s the same question we should be asking ourselves. Why wouldn’t we spend more time with the Father in prayer? Prayer is an essential aspect of being a disciple of Christ.

How often have you entered into a Bible study and heard someone say, *“Let’s say a quick prayer and get started”*? As if an obligatory passing glance at God is enough. This statement declares, *“God, thank you for attending OUR study. WE have several things to go over and discuss that WE are working on. If You have anything to share, just chime in whenever You feel the need.”* Really? Are we saying that the Lord of the universe, who created your inmost being in your mother’s womb only gets a passing glance and maybe an opportunity to share if He wants to chime in?

Prayer is about relationship! Nouwen says that *“Praying is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very center of your person, to see there what you would rather leave in darkness, and to touch there what you would rather leave untouched. Why would you really want to do that? Perhaps you would let the other cross your inner threshold to see something or to touch something, but to allow the other into that place where your most intimate life is shaped—that is dangerous and calls for defense.”*⁴

Unfortunately, that is often our posture toward prayer. DEFENSIVE. *“I’ll do it, but only if I can ask for things. Not if I have to tell Him my most darkest secrets.”* It’s then that we make excuses why we don’t pray:

- I don’t have the time.
- I don’t know how.
- It doesn’t really do anything for me.
- How do we know He’s really listening and answering?

⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1992), 19.

It's time to stop making excuses and simply talk to our Daddy. Let me explain. Brennan Manning writes this, "

Let us suppose you give your three-year-old daughter a coloring book and a box of crayons for her birthday. The following day, with the proud smile only a little one can muster, she presents her first pictures for inspection. She has colored the sun black, the grass purple, and the sky green. In the lower right-hand corner, she has added woozy wonders of floating slabs and hovering rings; on the left, a panoply of colorful, carefree squiggles. You marvel at her bold strokes and intuit that her psyche is railing against its own cosmic puniness in the face of a big, ugly world. Later at the office, you share with your staff your daughter's first artistic effort and you make veiled references to the early work of van Gogh. A little child cannot do a bad coloring; nor can a child of God do bad prayer. A father is delighted when his little one, leaving off her toys and friends, runs to him and climbs into his arms. As he holds his little one close to him, he cares little whether the child is looking around, her attention flitting from one thing to another, or just settling down to sleep. Essentially the child is choosing to be with her father, confident of the love, the care, the security that is hers in those arms. Our prayer is much like that. We settle down in our Father's arms, in his loving hands. Our mind, our thoughts, our imagination may flit about here and there; we might even fall asleep; but essentially we are choosing for this time to remain intimately with our Father, giving ourselves to him, receiving his love and care, letting him enjoy us as he will. It is very simple prayer. It is very childlike prayer. It is prayer that opens us out to all the delights of the kingdom.⁵

- God is looking for us to simply talk to Him like a child. Without being so distracted by the world, but instead by resting in His love and knowing with all our hearts we love Him. Just like this simple note my daughter gave me.



Jesus spent time with His Father in prayer in order to remain connected with Him in relationship and to seek the Father's guidance (as He was here to do His Father's will). In Luke's narrative, prayer occurs at every major point in Jesus' life:

⁵ Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Books, 2005), 155-156.

- At his baptism (3:21)
- At his selection of the Twelve (6:12)
- At Peter's confession (9:18)
- At Jesus' transfiguration (9:28-29)
- In his teaching the Lord's Prayer (11:1-4)
- In teaching on prayer (18:1-14)
- Before Peter's denial (22:32)
- Before His crucifixion (22:39-46).

Jesus did not want to take one step without His Father. Why would we? Albert Lemmons addresses this prayerlessness by saying:

I am sure the devil is pleased since his modus operandi is to keep you from praying. He will concede to any belief and will grant what the Bible has to say about the kingdom, God's grace, even praise and worship, however, if he can keep you off your knees, you are no threat to him! It is when you become fervent in spirit and in agonizing prayer that he becomes concerned. The devil will do anything in his power to keep you from praying.⁶

Prayerless religion is cold theory. Prayerless Christians have hindered God's work long enough. A prayerless pew is a powerless one, just as a prayerless pulpit is a powerless pulpit. Where there is great faith, there is much prayer. Where there is little faith, there is little prayer. Where there is no faith, there is no prayer. For one to say he/she believes in God but does not pray is a paradox, a tragedy. For one to believe in God but does not pray is a contradiction, a delusion. The extent of one's prayer life may very well be the barometer of faith.⁷

PRAYER IS:

- **Relationship** (Relating to God one-on-one for intimacy)
- **Reliance** (Relying on God for everything)
- **Recognition** (Recognizing God's presence and sovereignty in our lives)
- **Remembrance** (Remembering who God is, what He does, and what He wants)
- **Rest** (Resting in Him as the one who is in control and looking out for our best interest)

Prayer is our means of meeting with God in our hearts as He has made His home there with us. As Richard Foster puts it:

God has graciously allowed me to catch a glimpse into his heart, and I want to share with you what I have seen. Today the heart of God is an open wound of love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence.

And he is inviting you—and me—to come home, to come home to where we belong, to come home to that for which we were created. His arms are stretched out wide to receive us. His heart is enlarged to take us in.

For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation.

⁶ Albert George Lemmons, *Teach Us to Pray*, [Rev. and expanded] edition. (Nashville, Tenn.: Pollock Printing, 1978), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

And he welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.

We do not need to be shy. He invites us into the living room of his heart, where we can put on old slippers and share freely. He invites us into the kitchen of his friendship, where chatter and batter mix in good fun. He invites us into the dining room of his strength, where we can feast to our heart's delight. He invites us into the study of his wisdom, where we can learn and grow and stretch...and ask all the questions we want. He invites us into the workshop of his creativity, where we can be co-laborers with him, working together to determine the outcomes of events. He invites us into the bedroom of his rest, where new peace is found and where we can be naked and vulnerable and free. It is also the place of deepest intimacy, where we know and are known to the fullest.⁸

The key to this home, the heart of God, is PRAYER. If the key is prayer, the door is Christ. Foster goes on to make these statements:

- *How good of God to provide us a way into his heart. He knows that we are stiff-necked and hard-hearted, so he has provided a means of entrance. Jesus, the Christ, lived a perfect life, died in our place, and rose victorious over all the dark powers so that we might live through him. This is wonderfully good news. No longer do we have to stand outside, barred from nearness to God by our rebellion. We may now enter through the door of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.⁹*
- *Prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love. If prayer is simply an obligation to be met in order to remain obedient and get into heaven, then we have missed the point.¹⁰*
- *One day a friend of mine was walking through a shopping mall with his two-year-old son. The child was in a particularly cantankerous mood, fussing and fuming. The frustrated father tried everything to quiet his son, but nothing seemed to help. The child simply would not obey. Then, under some special inspiration, the father scooped up his son and, holding him close to his chest, began singing an impromptu love song. None of the words rhymed. He sang off key. And yet, as best he could, this father began sharing his heart. "I love you," he sang. "I'm so glad you're my boy. You make me happy. I like the way you laugh." On they went from one store to the next. Quietly the father continued singing off key and making up words that did not rhyme. The child relaxed and became still, listening to this strange and wonderful song. Finally, they finished shopping and went to the car. As the father opened the door and prepared to buckle his son into the car seat, the child lifted his head and said simply, "Sing it to me again, Daddy! Sing it to me again!"¹¹*

2. ⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 1-

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Now, let's look at some ways in which we can lean upon the chest of our Father and say, "Sing it to us again, Daddy! Sing it again!" The following prayer practice is called the A.C.T.S. prayer method and is a very simple prayer method that will allow you the opportunity to talk with God from your heart and connect more closely with Him. Here's how it works...

Each letter represents key elements that each participant will pray:

A **adoration** – "Praise be to God!" (Psalms 68:35). During this portion of the prayer, spend time adoring God. These are expressions of how much you adore Him. Praise Him for His power, majesty, creation, love, etc. This is not a time of Thanksgiving (that will come), but more a time of recognition for who God is and what He has done. It's funny, we should never run out of praise, but it is often the quietest moment in group prayer. Why? We are not prone to adore God in prayer. Instead we move straight to our supplications (requests to God). Instead, begin with praise and remember who He is. Look to the Psalms for great ways in which to praise God. ("God, you are _____.")

C **onfession** – "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) Share with God the ways in which you have messed up. Let Him know not only the sins you have committed, but also the ones you have been tempted by (even if you didn't commit them). This is a great way to be open and transparent with God and with your brothers and sisters. Through this God joins us in our struggle and so do our prayer partners. Remember, God already knows them. He is just wanting you to acknowledge them and seek His power and strength to overcome them. When you confess them, make sure you thank Him automatically for the forgiveness He immediately gives you and the strength to turn away from them in the future. ("God, I have _____.")

T **hanksgiving** – "I will magnify Him with thanksgiving." (Psalm 69:30) You have more reasons than you can count to thank God for. Spend time thanking Him for His love, faithfulness, patience, and the other thousands of things that He has done for you. ("God, thank You for _____.")

Supplication – “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6) Now, after praising, confessing, and thanking it is time to ask Him for what you want. He is the Creator and giver of all things. Therefore, it is important to share with Him your requests. The request itself is a recognition that you know where all things come from. These requests include intercessory prayer (or prayer for others). Let your God know what you ask of Him and ask it according to His Will and not your own. (“God, please _____.”)

With this method of prayer, you can enter into a wonderful relationship with God and each other. God bless each of you as you begin this conversation with the Father.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

LECTIO DIVINA (SACRED READING)

We know what wind is when we feel it come over our face. We know what snow is like when we make it into a snowball or watch snowflakes collect on our gloves. We know what loving someone feels like. This sort of “knowing” transcends the intellect; it is direct, sensational and experiential. No words can be used to truly describe what we “know”. *Lectio Divina* or Sacred Reading invites each of us into this kind of knowing. This kind of knowing is reflected in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians:

Ephesians 3:14-19

For this reason I kneel before the Father, [15] from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. [16] I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Lectio Divina invites us into God’s presence to listen for His particular, loving word **to me** at this particular moment in time. It is rooted in the assurance that **every part** of Scripture is inspired and can give voice to God’s particular word to us.

When we engage in *Lectio Divina*, we are not seeking to read the Bible for knowledge or instruction (although that may happen). It’s not about reading Scripture, but about allowing Scripture to read us. Instead we come to the words of the Bible seeking to be with God. We come to Scripture as if it were a secret rendezvous where we hope to spend some time with the One who loves us. We look at the words of the Bible as if they were words from a lover. We come to the text seeking to encounter God, seeking to make contact with God’s love and presence. We come to Scripture trusting God’s nearness and God’s desire to heal and transform us. We expect to meet with God just on the other side of Scripture.

LECTIO DIVINA

- *Lectio Divina* is approaching a text for the sake of a transforming encounter with God. Listening to Scripture to develop a friendship with Christ.
- Why *Lectio Divina*?

- In order to prayerfully encounter and surrender to the living God through attending to Scripture.
- Listen to these Scriptures:

Psalm 119:36, 97, 103, 111

*Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.
Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.*

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. [13] Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Deut. 30:14

No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

- You can practice Lectio Divina in these 5 steps:
 1. **Silencio**—quiet preparation of the heart. Come into God's presence, slow down, relax and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to Him.
 2. **Lectio**—read the word. Read a Scripture passage slowly and out loud, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait.
 3. **Meditatio**—meditate. Read the Scripture a second time out loud. Savor the words. Listen for any invitation that God is extending to you in this word. Reflect on the importance of the words that light up to you. Like Mary, who pondered the word in her heart, gently explore the ramifications of God's invitation.
 4. **Oratio**—respond, pray. Read the Scripture a third time. Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. What feelings has the text aroused in you? Name where you are resistant or want to push back. Become aware of

where you felt invited into a deeper way of being with God. Talk to God about these feelings.

5. **Contemplatio**—contemplate, rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Before you leave, you might consider a reminder that can help you dwell on or incarnate this word throughout the day.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- Get into a comfortable position. Begin to relax your entire body. Quiet your mind and your heart. Breathe in and out deeply. Sit in silence and empty yourself of all thoughts, images and emotions.
- Pray to God to be open more fully to the Spirit.
- READ PRAYERFULLY AND UNHURRIED (*Lectio*)

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Simply take in the passage you just heard and allow it to "register." (*Meditatio*)
- READ MORE SLOWLY AGAIN (*Lectio*)

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Now, listen for a word or a phrase that "shimmers" or reverberates in you. What is the word that attracts, touches, or even disturbs? (*Meditatio*)
- Ask each person to share the word or phrase that has touched them. Allow this to be a slow movement with ample time between the speaking. (*Oratio*)

- READ ONCE MORE (*Lectio*)

Philippians 3:7-11

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Attend to the way this word/phrase connects to the context of your life at this moment. Consider how it relates to what you have seen and heard today? How does it speak to what is happening at home, at school, in your down time, in our community, in the world? (*Meditatio*)
- Take an extended time, if desired, to explore this connection in thought, in journaling, in art, or in movement. How is God present to you there? What is God like for you in your life? Is God calling you individually or collectively to any particular response in your present situation? (*Meditatio*)
- Briefly share with the whole group what you have heard or discovered. (*Oratio*)
- Close with an extended time of silence, simply resting quietly in the presence of God. A spoken prayer or blessing may complete the silence, (*Contemplatio*)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Now open your eyes and sit up.
- What was the experience like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain silent and still? Why?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like "I'm not doing this right;" "Nothing is happening;" "I hate these kinds of exercises"?
- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Was the time restful or did you become anxious and agitated?
- Begin to see Scripture in a new light. We have been taught the reading Scripture is an intellectual pursuit. It is for gaining "knowledge" or "facts" of the Bible. We encourage you to begin practicing *Lectio Divina* in order to hear the love message that God is sending you through His life-giving words.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

3-COLUMN BIBLE STUDY

People often overcomplicate reading the Bible. So, let's not overcomplicate things. The following is a simple Bible study spiritual discipline that will help you interact with the Bible and provide you the opportunity to get to know God through His Word.

- Simply take a sheet of paper, turn it sideways (landscape) and make three columns like the picture below (fold it evenly twice). Label the first column 'Scripture', the second 'My Words' and the third 'I Will Do & Share'.

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>My Words</i>	<i>I Will Do & Share</i>

1. Write the passage **word-for-word** in the 1st column. Consider **Deut. 17:18-20**. Why did God ask the king to write down the Law of God in his own hand? Why couldn't someone else copy it for him?
 - a. When you copy a passage word-for-word you actually read it through several times (around five to seven times). It is a form of forced meditation for those of us who can't sit and think about a passage without losing focus. This process also keeps you from skimming familiar passages. When you write it out you have to think about every word.
2. Write the passage in **your own words** in the 2nd column.
 - a. When you finish copying the passage, use the second column to write the passage in your own words. Write it like you're telling a friend about it over a cup of coffee. Don't move on until you can write the passage in your own words. You see, you don't really understand it if you can't tell it to someone in your own words. And you can't obey Scripture unless you understand it. It's that simple.

Sometimes you will have to stop on a passage, read it again, and think about it quite a bit before you can put it in your own words. Often you won't believe how much you 'know' and yet how little you understand.

3. Ask God to reveal something you need to add to your life, take away from your life, or change in your life to obey this passage. Write your **"I Will"** statement in the 3rd column along with the person you plan to **share** it with.
 - a. **I Will** - In the third column you transition from knowing God's Word to obeying God's Word. In the 'I Will' column you need to look at each part of the passage. Ask God to reveal things you need to add to your life, take away from your life, or change in your life for you to obey this passage. Be very specific. The passage may say that God created the Earth, but you have to decide what that means in your life. How does your life change because you believe that God created the Earth? What do you need to do differently? What can you do in the next 24 to 48 hours to obey this passage? Every time we open God's Word, He invites us into relationship. We call His invitation 'grace,' because we can't do anything to deserve it. Obedience is how we accept His invitation. God lives with those who obey His Word. (John 14:23-24) When we study God's Word we have a choice: we choose to obey Him or we choose to disobey Him. It is really that simple. See this third column as your response to God's invitation.
 - b. **Share** - As you finish this study, you have two responsibilities. First, you need to meet with other followers of Christ in your relational circles and discuss what you learned. You need to tell them your 'I Will' statements. You need to ask them to hold you accountable as they figure out ways to help you obey God's Word. Second, look for opportunities to share what God said to you. Try to work the phrase, "God taught me something today", or something similar, into your conversation and wait for their response. This creates discussion opportunities. If people are interested, they ask for more information. If it isn't the right time for them, they ignore you and you don't continue to share. When they do ask, "share what God taught you", and if it's the right time, they will ask more questions. Their questions help you understand where they are in their spiritual journey. You don't want to move faster than the Holy Spirit wants you to, or you risk pushing them away from the Gospel.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

JESUS PRAYER

We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray continually”. Other versions say “without ceasing” or “all the time”. When you first think about that you say to yourself, “THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE!” But is it really? Is it impossible to pray all the time? Let’s think about it another way.

We breathe unconsciously. In other words, we don’t think about it. Although we do not think about breathing throughout our day, we recognize that it is necessary to sustain life. The fact that we do not think about it does not make it any less important to our health. So, is it possible that prayer can be the same as breathing? As Calhoun notes, “Breath prayer reminds us that just as we can’t live on one breath of air, we can’t live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe Him in all day long.”¹² For it is in God that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). This sort of praying can be done in many ways, but there are two that I want to share: The Jesus Prayer and Centering Prayer.

We first learn of the Jesus Prayer through a Russian pilgrim in the story of his journeys in his book *The Way of a Pilgrim*. He learned it from an old monk who he took on as his spiritual guide. The pilgrim asked the monk “Is unceasing prayer possible?” The old monk informed him that indeed it is possible and that it comes in quieting the mind and making the mind one with the heart. The young pilgrim became excited and pressed the old monk about how he could learn to pray like that. The old monk said:

*The ceaseless Jesus Prayer is a continuous, uninterrupted call on the holy name of Jesus Christ with the lips, mind and heart; and in the awareness of His abiding presence it is a plea for His blessing in all undertakings, in all places, at all times, even in sleep. The words of the prayer are: ‘**Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.**’ Anyone who becomes accustomed to this prayer will experience great comfort as well as the need to say it continuously. He will become accustomed to it to such a degree that he will not be able to do without it and eventually the prayer will flow in him.*¹³

¹² Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 205.

¹³ Jones, *The Sacred Way*, 60.

The old monk then gave this young pilgrim a task. He told him to go and recite the prayer 3,000 times a day. He gave him a rope with one hundred knots in it to keep track. The first few days the young pilgrim found it difficult, but then he began to notice the prayer to be easy and delightful. He continued on for a week and then returned to the old monk. The old monk told him to increase to 6,000 times a day. In 10 days the young pilgrim had grown so accustomed to the prayer that he felt as though something were missing if he did not recite it. He told this to the old monk who said immediately, "Do not waste any time, but decide, with help of God, to recite the prayer 12,000 times a day. Rise earlier and retire later; stay alone, and every two weeks come to me for direction."¹⁴

At first, the pilgrim had great difficulty with his new direction. His tongue went numb, his jaw got tight, his thumb ached, and his forearm swelled. But as the days passed, the prayer became the air the pilgrim breathed. It woke him in the morning and overwhelmed him during the day and he dreamed about it at night. It became pure joy to him. He began to feel love for everyone he met, considering each his brother or sister. Conversation with God became his very breath.

The pilgrim went on to write his book and in it he says:

*Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes and breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather, your thoughts flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them over and over again.*¹⁵

The prayer itself is a combination of "Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 18:39) with "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Breathing in you pray, "Lord Jesus Christ." Breathing out you say, "have mercy on me, a sinner." What a beautiful prayer!

JESUS PRAYER

- *Jesus Prayer* is a form of contemplative prayer linked to the rhythms of breathing: 1) breathe in, calling on the name of Jesus, and 2) breathe out a simple God-given desire for mercy.
- Why *Jesus Prayer*?
 - To pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 205.

- Listen to these Scriptures:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Be joyful always; [17] pray continually; [18] give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

2 Peter 1:3-4

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. [4] Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Get into a comfortable position. Begin to relax your entire body. Quiet your mind and your heart. Breathe in and out deeply. Intentionally place yourself before God. In rhythm with your breathing, gratefully inhale the breath of life. Exhale remembering that Jesus gave His last breath for love of you. Gently and thankfully repeat the Jesus Prayer. Breathe in, “Lord Jesus Christ,” and breathe out, “have mercy on me, a sinner.”
- When you become aware of thoughts and distractions during the prayer, return ever-so-gently to repeating the simple phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.”
- At the end of the prayer time, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes and close your time with God by reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

Matthew 6:9-13

*'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Now everyone open your eyes and sit up.
- What were these experiences like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain silent and still? Why?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like “I’m not doing this right;” “Nothing is happening;” “I hate these kinds of exercises”?

- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Was the time restful or did you become anxious and agitated?
- Prayer is our privilege to have the ability to communicate with God. We spend so much time in prayer talking that we seldom listen. God is not a dispensing machine or a fast-food drive through. Begin to see how simple prayers such as the Jesus Prayer can quickly help you come into God's presence and become more and more aware of His incredible love for you.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The following prayer practice is praying the Lord's Prayer as thematic guide for prayer. You can choose to pray through the whole prayer each time you meet, or choose to focus on certain aspects of the prayer each meeting. This is a wonderful way to connect with God and each other through prayer.

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name

(let your Name be treated holy; with reverence; set your Name apart)

Thank you that we can call you Father. For we know that it is only because you have saved us in Christ that we can now call you, Abba. This is a blessing not shared with the world, but with your children alone. And you are in heaven, fully transcendent and not limited by created things.

And so we lift up your Name because it is almighty and it is good, holy, just, and righteous. And we ask you to continue to make your Name great here and among the nations. Set your Name apart, that you and you alone be glorified and worshipped.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven

Father, we seek your Kingdom and we thank you that it appeared in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And therefore we ask that it continue to manifest itself in the church, for which He died. May your Spirit spur us in the church to exhibit your work of the Kingdom here on earth as we continue to await the full appearance of it in glory when He returns. And in all this may your will alone be done, as it has throughout all of time, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread *(that which will suffice us this day; "bread of necessity")*

God we give thanks for all that you have continued to give us on a daily basis; for we know that all drink and food and oxygen and everything in-between are from your Hand and no other source. And so we ask that you continue to give us the sustenance that our body's needs to be healthy and function well for today.

And forgive us our debts *(sins), as we also have forgiven our debtors* *(those who have sinned against us)*

And Father we ask that you forgive us, for we are sinners in need of your mercy. We ask this by grace through faith, as the blood of Christ continually covers the doorposts of our hearts; so that your wrath may pass-over us in Christ; and that we may be given joy in

freedom from sin. Forgive us for the wrong we have done against you and forgive us for failing to do those things that we knew were right. Forgive us not only for those things that we are aware of, but also those we are not.

And with this we commit to you that we have forgiven those who have wronged us in any way. Give us clean hearts toward others and rid us at this moment of any grudges or ill will. For we know that you have forgiven us on an infinite scale; so, may we not hold any forgiveness from others, which is a debt miniscule in comparison.

And lead us not into temptation

LORD we ask that you not take us down a path from which we turn from you. Let us not be led to a place or circumstance that would overcome us beyond the ability that you have graced us with in certain measure. Father, may your hand of grace be upon us in this way.

But deliver us from evil

And rescue us; deliver us from this evil and wicked generation. By the power of your Spirit within us, may all our senses be aware of evil's presence so that we may not be sucked in to its fleeting pleasures and ensnaring traps. Thank you for Christ, who resisted all that the world, men, and Satan had to offer Him. May we be of such boldness and commitment to you and your ways.

[For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen]

The Kingdom is in your hands, as are all the kingdoms and powers of this world. You are the Almighty God of Creation, and yours is all sovereignty, supremacy, and sufficiency. And all glory, splendor, and praise are due to you and to no other.

By the power of the Holy Spirit and through the Name of Jesus Christ we pray to you, Our Father in heaven, Amen.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

FIXED PRAYER TIME

We all realize that prayer is a time of release—of letting our hearts speak to God and in turn listen to his leading. Prayer takes us to the very throne of God. Through prayer we interact with the Spirit (Romans 8:26-27) and the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14-16) to praise, thank and honor God as well as ask for his intercession. Prayer is crucial to our spiritual health and relationship with God. It is also incredibly powerful. Through prayer we can access the power of God and make lasting differences. James tells us how:

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.¹⁶

Fixed prayer time invites us to come into the presence of God through prayer regularly. It prioritizes time at several points throughout the day to allow us to withdraw from all other activity and concentrate solely on speaking to God. It leads us to be able to hear a word from the Lord during our otherwise busy day. It creates for us a rhythm of regular daily prayer that enhances our relationship with Christ every day.

Let's look at the practice of fixed prayer time:

- To stop my activity and pray throughout the day at pre-appointed times
- To fix regular hours each day and develop consistent patterns of talking to God throughout the day
- Why fixed prayer time? To integrate God into every facet of our daily life through fixed regular communication with him.

¹⁶ James 5:13-18, ESV.

Consider these passages:

Acts 3:1

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

Psalms 119:164

Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules.

Acts 10:9

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Daniel 6:10

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Choose four fixed prayer times during the day. You decide the times but choose one early in the morning before you begin your day's activities and choose one at night before you go to bed.
- Wherever you are and whatever you are doing when it is prayer time- stop completely and if possible withdraw to a private and quiet place.
- For a moment just be still and allow the concerns of the moment to vanish from your mind as you settle into a comfortable prayer posture. Then close your eyes and open your heart to God and to the powerful way in which he can work in your prayers. Imagine yourself literally before his throne. Feel the presence of God before you.
- As you begin to pray have a real expectation for God to work and move within your prayers. Always remember that the effective prayer of the righteous accomplishes much.
- Let the morning prayer be a prayer of praise and blessing. Start the day by praising God for a night of rest and another day of opportunity to serve him, invite him into your day's activities and ask his blessing upon them. Read aloud Psalm 34:1-3 before you pray and apply it to your day: *I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!*
- For the second prayer of the day- simply pray the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13. Pray this prayer slowly but with passion- taking the time to meditate upon the words: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and*

forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- Allow the third fixed time prayer to be one of intercession. Make a list of special and urgent prayer needs to be taken to the Father. Be specific, take the names and situations on your heart directly to him and ask and expect him to move upon your requests. Read Philippians 4:6-7 carefully before you pray: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*
- For the last prayer of the day, be sure to make it early enough before bedtime so that you will not lose focus because of being sleepy. Again get away to a quiet place and contemplate on the blessings of your day. Look for ways God worked in and around you during the day. Take the advice of the old hymn and “count your many blessings- name them one by one.” Use this prayer opportunity for a time of pure thanksgiving. Do nothing but thank God for the numerous ways he has blessed you- both temporal and eternal. Read Psalm 121 before you pray: *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- After each prayer time open your eyes and before resuming your normal activity take the time to reflect on your prayer.
- How was the experience for you?
- Was it difficult to remain focused on the specific prayer content? Were there any distractions? Did you find your mind wondering?
- Was it a peaceful time for you or did you find yourself wanting to get it over quickly, so you could get back to the day’s routine?
- What did you find profitable about it? Could it become a regular part of your routine?

Regular daily fixed prayer time may first be difficult- after all we have to interrupt whatever is on our agenda at the moment which sometimes may present challenges, but the more we make fixed prayer time a priority, the more enriching our prayers will become as we spend regular time in the presence of God. We will begin to look forward to these daily releases, grow more in our faith and start anticipating the answers we will receive from God- expecting him to work in our prayers!

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

FASTING

The Old Testament and New Testament people of faith both practiced the discipline of fasting. Scripture indicates they fasted in order to obtain strength during times of mourning, mercy in moments of distress, spiritual focus during times of repentance, or simply to set aside time in order to enhance their prayer life and draw closer to God. The idea behind fasting is to set aside those things that sustain you, demand your attention, dominate you, or control your thoughts in your daily life in an attempt to replace them (for a certain period of time) with a focus and reliance upon God.

Those who practice a food fast replace their time of eating with a moment of prayer or meditation toward God. Christians today continue this practice in hopes of replacing their reliance upon earthly food for physical sustenance with the bread of life for spiritual sustenance. The scriptural approach to food fasting places God in the center of our thoughts and actions while setting aside the physical blessing we are prone to depend upon. In many respects, we are setting aside those blessings that God has provided (upon which we develop an unhealthy dependence) and focus, instead, on the Creator from which all things come.

As is the case with most spiritual disciplines, there are incorrect attitudes, reasons, and motives that can be associated with fasting. Fasting in order to manipulate God into answering prayer quickly, to encourage God in controlling other people, to reason with God as one lives in disobedience to His Word, or in order to draw unnecessary attention to oneself are all highly discouraged and result in a negative response from God. Fasting cannot be used as a means of manipulating God for holy or unholy purposes.

Consider these passages:

Matthew 6:16-18

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Isaiah 58:6-7

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,*

*to let the oppressed go free,
 and to break every yoke?
 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
 and bring the homeless poor into your house;
 when you see the naked, to cover him,
 and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*

Guidelines for Fasting from Food (Taken from Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*):¹⁷

- Don't fast when you are sick, traveling, pregnant or nursing. People with diabetes, gout, liver disease, kidney disease, ulcers, hypoglycemia, cancer and blood diseases should not fast.
- Don't fast if you are in a hurry and are fasting for immediate results regarding some decision. Fasting is not magic.
- Listen for a nudging from God to fast.
- Stay hydrated. Always drink plenty of water and fluids.
- If you are new to fasting, begin by fasting for one meal. Spend the time with God that you would normally be eating.
- Work up to longer fasts. Don't attempt prolonged fasts without guidance. Check with your doctor before attempting long periods of fasting.
- If you decide to fast regularly, give your body time to adjust to new rhythms of eating. You may feel more tired on days you fast. Adjust your responsibilities appropriately. (Expect your tongue to feel coated, and expect to have bad breath.)
- Begin a fast after supper. Fast until supper the next day. This way you miss two, rather than three, meals.
- Don't break your fast with a huge meal. Eat small portions of food. The longer the fast, the more you need to break the fast gently.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Make a decision to fast from food for a specific period of time beginning with a predetermined date. Make the planned fast for a short period of time, such as lunchtime during the week. (As you practice this more, extend your time period of fasting.) Take into account any medical issues you may have. You may need to consult a physician prior to putting this discipline into practice if you are taking certain medications or battle certain illnesses such as diabetes, kidney diseases, etc. Plan to drink plenty of fluids and remain hydrated during the entire fast.
- During the time you are fasting, schedule a time in solitude whereby you can commune with God through prayer. Bring your Bible and read the following passages to yourself that reflect the thoughts of other people of God as they fasted: I Sam 7:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:16; Acts 13:2-3; Isaiah 58:3-7; Matt 6:16; Luke 18:9-14; Ps 103:1-5.
- Relax and breathe in a restful manner as you commune with God.
- Praise God and thank Him for the protection He provides you and your family. Thank Him for delivering you from the evil one through His son, Jesus. Tell Him that you love Him

¹⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 220.

and desire to be His servant and a true disciple of His son, Jesus. Thank Him for His mercy and compassion towards His creation. Confess to Him your sin and ask for His forgiveness. Ask Him to walk closely with you for the remainder of this day. Ask for the direction of His Spirit. Worship Him!

- As your fast continues through the day, think on God and look for evidence of Him around you.
- If you are fasting with another brother or sister in Christ, share your thoughts with each other.
- Before you break your fast, thank God for the food and other sustenance of life that He continually provides you.
- When beginning to eat again, consume small portions in order to avoid illness.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Was the process of fasting an exercise in self-denial for you?
- Was your relationship enhanced with God as your focus turned away from food and toward God?
- What other things are important to you that could become a part of a fast in your life so that your attentiveness is shifted toward God?
- How do you think fasting could impact unity within the church?

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

I.O.U.S.

This prayer practice is simple, yet very powerful and effective. I learned this prayer from John Piper in his book *When I Don't Desire God*. This one is easy to learn and is a great way to pray to God throughout your day by using Scripture. We often struggle with our desire to recognize God throughout our days and our desire for Him is overshadowed by our daily routines. Therefore, this prayer practice is intended to gently draw your attention back to God and remind yourself of your deep love and desire for Him alone.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

The use of the acronym I.O.U.S. makes this prayer very simple to remember. Each verse of the prayer comes from Psalms and is as follows (included are John Piper's thoughts on each):

Incline – **Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! (Psalm 119:36)**

The first thing my soul needs is an inclination toward God and his Word. Without that, nothing else will happen of any value in my life. I must want to know God and read his Word and draw near to him. Where does that "want to" come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 119: 36 teaches us to pray, "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!" Very simply we ask God to take our hearts, which are more inclined to breakfast and the newspaper, and change that inclination. We are asking that God create desires that are not there.¹⁸

Open – **Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18)**

Next, I need to have the eyes of my heart opened so that when my inclination leads me to the Word, I see what is really there, and not just my own ideas. Who opens the eyes of the heart? God does. So, Psalm 119:18 teaches us to pray, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." So many times, we read the Bible and see nothing wonderful. Its reading does not produce joy. So what can we do? We can cry to God: "Open the eyes of my heart, O Lord, to see what it says about you as wonderful."¹⁹

¹⁸ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2004), Kindle Locations 2679-2683.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 2684-2688.

Unite – **Unite my heart to fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)**

Then I am concerned that my heart is badly fragmented. Parts of it are inclined, and parts of it are not. Parts see wonder, and parts say, "That's not so wonderful." What I long for is a united heart where all the parts say a joyful Yes! to what God reveals in his Word. Where does that wholeness and unity come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 86: 11 teaches us to pray, "Unite my heart to fear your name." Don't stumble over the word fear when you thought we were seeking joy. The fear of the Lord is a joyful experience when you renounce all sin. A thunderstorm can be a trembling joy when you know you can't be destroyed by lightning. "O Lord, let your ear be attentive to . . . the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name" (Neh. 1: 11). "His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11: 3). Therefore pray that God would unite your heart to joyfully fear the Lord.²⁰

Satisfy – **Satisfy me in the morning with your steadfast love. (Psalm 90:14)**

What I really want from all this engagement with the Word of God and the work of his Spirit in answer to my prayers is for my heart to be satisfied with God and not with the world. Where does that satisfaction come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 90: 14 teaches us to pray, "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."²¹

As you notice, this is an easy way to direct your attention back to God throughout your days. It doesn't require much, but it addresses your heart and its tendency to lean toward self rather than God. The easiest way to pray this prayer is to simply pray, "**Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. Unite my heart to fear your name. Satisfy me in the morning with your steadfast love.**" You can also add to each line your thoughts toward that statement at that very moment. An example of this would be...

- ***Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!*** That is, focus my affections and desires upon you, and eradicate everything in me that would oppose such a focus.
- ***Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*** That is, let your light shine and show me what you have willed to communicate through the biblical authors.
- ***Unite my heart to fear your name.*** That is, enthrall me with who you are.
- ***Satisfy me in the morning with your steadfast love.*** That is, fulfill me with the fact that your covenant love has been poured out on me through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

²⁰ Ibid., **Kindle Locations 2689-2696.**

²¹ Ibid., Kindle Locations 2697-2700.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- After each prayer time open your eyes and before resuming your normal activity take the time to reflect on your prayer.
- How was the experience for you?
- Was it difficult to remain focused on the specific prayer content? Were there any distractions? Did you find your mind wondering?
- Was it a peaceful time for you or did you find yourself wanting to get it over quickly, so you could get back to the day's routine?
- What did you find profitable about it? Could it become a regular part of your routine?

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

IGNATIAN EXAMEN

This is a practice that is also known as “*examination of consciousness or awareness*”. It provides a way of noticing where God is throughout our day. It is a practice that helps us become aware of what we might have otherwise missed in the busyness of our day. The questions pondered in this exercise open our attention to how God’s moving is present in every aspect of our lives. It leads us to listen deeply to the experiences of our lives.

The *Examen* can open us to both the difficult and beautiful in our lives, relationships and what we do. The *Examen* is also a useful way of reflecting alone or with others on what God is saying to us through a class, a meal, a sporting event, a relationship or a conflict.

EXAMEN

- The *Examen* is a practice for discerning the voice and activity of God within the flow of the day. It is a vehicle that creates deeper awareness of God-given desires in one’s life.
- Why *Examen*?
 - To notice both God and my God-given desires throughout the day.
- Listen to these Scriptures:

Colossians 1:9

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Philippians 1:9-11

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

1. In order to practice the awareness Examen, select a time and place (usually at the end of the day) that is peaceful and in which you may be alert and prayerfully

attentive. Take a few minutes to prepare yourself for this prayer in whatever way is natural for you.

2. Get into a comfortable position. Begin to relax your entire body. Quiet your mind and your heart. Breathe in and out deeply. Sit in silence and empty yourself of all thoughts, images and emotions.
3. In quiet prayer, begin to simply look over your day from the beginning to the present moment. Begin by attending to the moments where you were most grateful and then to those moments where you were least grateful.
4. There are many other ways to ask the same questions:
 - At what moments did you give and receive the most love today? At what moments did you give and receive the least love today?
 - At what moments did you feel most alive today? At what moments did you feel least alive today?
 - When today did you have the deepest sense of connection with God, others and yourself? When today did you have the least sense of connection?
 - Where were you aware of living out the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit?
5. At the end of your prayer, take time to thank God for the gift of this day and God's presence in all that was given.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Now everyone open your eyes and sit up.
- What were these experiences like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain silent and still? Why?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like "I'm not doing this right;" "Nothing is happening;" "I hate these kinds of exercises"?
- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Was the time restful or did you become anxious and agitated?
- We fail to see God in our lives in any and every situation. We get to a point where we feel that was us and this little part here was HIM. Spend more time becoming aware of God in your life by practicing the Examen. Practicing the Examen will make us aware of what we need to do more or less of. Otherwise we will continue to repeat what we have always done. Become aware of God in everything that you experience, both good and bad. HE IS YOUR CONSTANT COMPANION.

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

7-DAY PRAYERS

This prayer practice is for focusing your prayers of each day of the week on a specific area. Throughout that day, stop and pray the prayer often as it may change its focus throughout your day. Follow the same 7-Day pattern for each week of the month. This is a simple focused prayer method. Share and discuss with someone how these prayers focused your week and your month.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

SUNDAY

PRAYER OF CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS

“Forgive us our debts”

(Matthew 6:12)

Spend some time sharing with God the things you have been struggling with in your life. Be detailed with Him. Know that He already knows, but just wants you to share it all with Him as you would your closest friend. Then ask Him for His incredible forgiveness and thank Him for it, because that is how quick it works.

MONDAY

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

(Psalm 100:4)

Spend some time thanking God for everything that He has done for you in your life. This might take a while. Really think about it. Thank Him even for the bad things that have happened and how they have made and are making you who you are and hopefully who He wants you to be, YOU.

TUESDAY

PRAYER OF PRAISE

“Hallowed be Your name!”

(Matthew 6:9)

Spend some time praising God for who He is. He is above all! Let Him know that you recognize that. If you need to, pray through Scripture that praises Him in ways that you may have difficulty finding the words to express. Just because they aren't your words doesn't mean you can't pray them. Praying Scripture is a wonderful blessing to God.

WEDNESDAY

PRAYER OF GUIDANCE

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done!”

(Matthew 6:10)

Spend some time asking for God's guidance in your life. Pray that it is His Will that you are seeking and not your own. Pray that His Will be made evident in your life.

THURSDAY

PRAYER OF NEEDS

“Give us today our daily bread.”

(Matthew 6:11)

It's ok to ask God for not only those things that you need, but also the things you want. Ask Him. But let Him know that you recognize His Will, and maybe, just maybe the things you think you need and want do or don't fall in line with His Will. So, acknowledge that. But ask, because He wants you to.

FRIDAY

PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS (FOR ENEMIES)

“As we also have forgiven our debtors”

(Matthew 6:12)

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

(Matthew 6:14-15)

Spend some time praying for those you struggle with the most. You know, those who talk about you behind your back. Those who publicly humiliate you. Those you just can't stand for one reason or another. Pray for them. Pray not only that you forgive them, but pray that God bless them richly in their lives. Yeah, you heard that right. Pray that God bless them and that if they don't know Him that they will come to know Him, perhaps through you.

SATURDAY

PRAYER OF PROTECTION

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...”

(Matthew 6:13)

Ask God to protect you from Satan and his demons. Ask Him to provide (as He promised) the means for which to get out of trouble. Ask Him for the strength that only He can provide to help you overcome your daily temptations. Ask and receive. Recognize Him as the only source of goodness and power in your life. God is good. He WILL deliver! Acknowledge that He may not deliver in the way you want, but that you know He will protect you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What were these prayers like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain focused on them throughout your day? Explain?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like “I’m not doing this right;” “Nothing is happening;” “I hate these kinds of exercises”?
- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Was the time restful or did you become anxious and agitated?
- Did your focus in these areas change throughout the day?

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

PERSONALIZED SCRIPTURE PRAYERS

One method to pray Scripture is to take prayers (or other passages) from the Bible and personalize them by placing *I*, *me*, and *my* in the text. Below are some examples of practicing this form of prayer. Please do not limit yourself to the personalized prayers from Scripture below but find others that you can put in the first person and direct to God personally. This will bring the Bible to life for you and help you connect to the heart of God. Try praying these throughout your day and allow them to move you ever closer to God.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

PRAYER #1

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Holy Father!

For this reason I bow my knees before You, Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of Your glory You may grant me to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith—that I, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that I may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to You, Father, who are able to do far more abundantly than all that I ask or think, according to the power at work within me, to You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen!

PRAYER #2

2 PETER 1:3-9

Holy Father!

Your divine power has granted to me all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of You who called me to Your own glory and excellence, by

which You have granted to me Your precious and very great promises, so that through them I may become a partaker of Your divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, I make every effort to supplement my faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are mine and are increasing, they keep me from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of You, my Lord Jesus Christ. For if I lack these qualities I am so nearsighted that I am blind, having forgotten that I was cleansed from my former sins.

Amen!

PRAYER #3

PSALM 130:1-6

Holy Father!

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O LORD, should mark my iniquities, O Lord, how could I stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for You, LORD, my soul waits, and in Your word I hope; my soul waits for You, Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

Amen!

PRAYER #4

JEREMIAH 29:11-14A

Holy Father!

I know You have plans for me, as You, my Lord, have declared, plans for my welfare and not for evil, plans to give me a future and a hope. Therefore, I will call upon You and come and pray to You, and I know You will hear me. I will seek You and find You, when I seek You with all my heart. I will find You, as You, my Lord, have declared.

Amen!

PRAYER #5

EPHESIANS 1:17-23

Holy Father!

The God of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, I ask that You may give me the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of You, having the eyes of my heart enlightened, that I may know what is the hope to which You have called me, what are the

riches of Your glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of Your power toward me who believes, according to the working of Your great might that You worked in Christ when You raised Him from the dead and seated Him at Your right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And You put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Amen!

PRAYER #6

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-6

Holy Father!

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Therefore, I will be patient and kind; I will not envy or boast; I will not be arrogant or rude. I will not insist on my own way; I will not be irritable or resentful; I will not rejoice at wrongdoing, but I will rejoice with the truth. I will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things.

Amen!

PRAYER #7

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

Holy Father!

I have not ceased to pray to You, asking that I may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that I may walk in a manner worthy of You, fully pleasing to You, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in my knowledge of You. May You strengthen me with all power, according to Your glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, that I may give You thanks, as You have qualified me to share in the inheritance of Your saints in light. You have delivered me from the domain of darkness and transferred me to the kingdom of Your beloved Son, in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Amen!

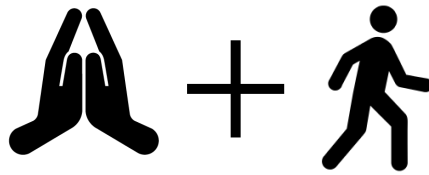
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What were these prayers like for you?
- Was it difficult to remain focused on them throughout your day? Explain?
- Did your mind become full of criticisms like “I’m not doing this right;” “Nothing is happening;” “I hate these kinds of exercises”?
- Did you notice lots of mental commentary, day-dreaming, or even analysis of what was going on?
- Did using Scripture as prayer enhance your prayers? How?
- Did your focus change throughout the day?

PRAYERS & SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

WALKING PRAYERS

Prayer can be done in many ways. With this prayer practice, spend some time each week speaking “walking prayers.”



What I mean by this is that you do your praying by walking in particular places. Some of us think and concentrate best when we are moving rather than sitting still. This movement with God is still a time to communicate with Him and hear His still voice. With this form of prayer, one finds themselves in a particular location where they feel a need to pray over that area with specific concerns. For instance, one may do a walking prayer through their home. During this prayer, they may pray over each room asking for God’s presence in that place. Or, they may pray over each bed and the head the lay there each evening. They may pray that those individuals find rest for the souls in God alone.

One may find themselves doing a walking prayer at school, their church building, neighborhoods, a hospital, local government facilities, etc. The locations are plentiful and the prayers needing to be prayed in those locations can be limitless. The point is to spend time having focus prayer in a particular locale for specific reasons. Spend time determining these locations and the reasons why you would want to pray over them.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

- Walk through your home and pray over every room. Specifically think about what happens in the room regularly, who is there most of the time, how can God use this space and the people who occupy it for His glory?
- Walk through your school or place of work and prayer over all the areas you are regularly in. Pray over the offices of administration or your supervisors. Pray for those who do not know the Lord in that place and how might God use you to reach them for Him.
- Pray in places that are local hangouts in your communities (parks, restaurants, ball parks/fields, etc.). Pray that as you frequent these places, that you be a shining light for Jesus there. Pray that as you interact with people there that you may help them see Christ’s love through your words, attitudes, and actions.

- Before a major community event occurs, go to the place where it is being held and pray over it. Spend time asking God to help those who will be there to come to know Him. Pray that as you encounter people at that event, you will make a difference in their lives. Ask God to help you be attentive to their needs and hear their heart cry. Ask God to use you as His instrument during the event.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. From Scripture we learn that God is on the move and cannot be contained. Therefore, He is in every place? How does this make you rethink the prayers you prayed in these locations?
2. How does movement effect your praying? Why?
3. Which helps you concentrate on God more, walking prayers or praying sitting still? Explain your answer.
4. Will you make it a habit to do walking prayers in locations? Why or why not?