



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Quality Time with God

Second Edition
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For the People of St. Peter Lutheran Church
Spokane, WA
By
Intern Pastor Seth Ramage

St. Peter Lutheran Church
4620 N. Regal
Spokane, WA 99207

Through the weeks of Lent, we will meet on Thursday evenings to participate in a Midweek Service. The service we will use, *That You May Have Life*, was written by Marty Haugen and Susan Briehl to help us center our spiritual practices in the words of the Bible. To further help us reflect during these worships and in our personal lives away from the church, I have written this booklet framing spiritual practices Christians have used and adapted over two millennia.

Some of the practices you will find in this booklet have shades of the spirituality that Jesus and his first followers experienced. Some of the practices are more reflective of technological advances in the societies that produced them. No matter the context of these practices, the intent is the same: *spirituality is meant to serve as a way to cultivate our relationship with God through Christ*. In our spiritual practices, we are reminded who we are, who God is, and what Christ has done for us. As we continue to practice our spirituality, we will notice our lives shifting. God will be at the center as we learn to view each life experience through the lens of God's calling in our lives. My hope is that this booklet will not only serve in our Lenten journey, but will be accessible for all seasons of life.

Each of the practices in this booklet are limited in that we do not have the time or space to explore every angle of the action. Rather, this is a short how-to, with the purpose of creating a skeleton on which you can add your own details. Mix and match these practices, both the order in which they are presented as individual practices, and by taking bits and pieces from one practice or another to create something new. There is no right way to "do" spirituality. Allow this booklet to become a springboard into deeper understanding and exploration in the rich tradition of Christian spirituality.

Before we jump in, consider a few principals that undergird each of these practices:

Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life-
Trish Harrison Warren

Meditations with Icons: For Children and the Young at Heart-
Nita Ng, Esther Pollak

The New Stations of the Cross: The Way of the Cross According to Scripture- Megan McKenna

The Practice of Spiritual Direction- William A. Barry and William J. Connolly

The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life- Tony Jones and Phyllis Tickle

The Shack- Wm. Paul Young

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life-
Marjorie J. Thompson

Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul- Jan Johnson

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life- Donald Whitney

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us-
Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Thirsty for God- Bradley Holt

50 Ways to Pray- Teresa Blythe

FURTHER READING

Presented Here in Alphabetical Order

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life- Santideva

Backpacking with the Saints: Wilderness Hiking as Spiritual Practice- Belden C. Lane

Better Than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives- Gretchen Rubin

Everyday Spiritual Practice: Simple Pathways for Enriching Your Life- Scott W Alexander

The Grace in Living: Recognize It, Trust It, Abide in It- Kathleen Dowling Singh

Grounded: Finding God in the World A Spiritual Revolution- Diana Butler Bass

Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive- Helen Cepero

Keeping the Sabbath Day Wholly- Marva Dawn

The Last Lecture- Randy Pausch

The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People- John Ortberg

1) *Time*. Set aside a portion of your day, anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour, to engage these practices. Use a part of the day when you are most awake and active, rather than a time you find yourself tired or preoccupied. 2) *Presence*. You are seeking a relationship with God. Enter into silence during your set aside time. Put away your phone, turn off the TV, let your family members know not to disturb you. Spend quality time with God, as you would with someone who is special to you. 3) *Intention*. Spiritual practices are not simply to know yourself better, but to know yourself in relation to God. If our practice stops at self-knowledge, our spirituality suffers. Practice your spirituality with the expectation that you will learn more of God's relationship with you.

If these three principals are explicit in your spiritual practice, the rest will come with time. There is a reason this is called practice. Building a relationship with God is not a one-and-done experience. It is cultivated through time, presence, and intention through the years of our lives. If you find yourself in the middle of a dry spell or struggling to get started, keep seeking to experience these practices in a way that is accessible to you. With God's help, you will be successful.

At the end of this booklet, you will find a list of books, both ancient and contemporary, that help frame spirituality in an accessible way, as I have tried to do here. The one I recommend first is *Soul Feast*, by Marjorie J. Thompson. She is able to explore in more detail what I have put forth here as a bare-bones approach.

The journey of spiritual practices is a beautiful way to know God. I pray that you will find this booklet useful in your spiritual life.

Good luck in your journey. God is with you!

Intern Pastor Seth Ramage
Lent 2018

If, even after being patient, you don't feel closer to God, first reexamine these three foundational points of spirituality. *Time* is difficult to gauge, since people have different needs in this area. *Presence* and *Intention* are much easier to take stock of. You will know in your heart if you are lacking in either. Spirituality is not an act of personal willpower. It is cooperation between human and divine. Ask God for help, and you will find that *God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves*.

I originally wrote this booklet in the Spring of 2017 for two reasons: First, I was taking a Spiritual Formation class at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia with Dr. John Largen. Second, I was serving as a Senior Seminarian at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Narberth, PA with Pastor Josh Ferris. Spiritual practices have always been an interest of mine, so combining a class project, service to a congregation, and my own interest made this booklet possible. I've been glad to be able to revisit my pet project in the Spring of 2018 for the people of St. Peter. This booklet has remained mostly the same, with the only major content edits occurring on the Title Page, Introduction, Conclusion, and Book List. Each of these has been adjusted to reflect my new context and my shifting perceptions of what makes for good reading on the topic of spirituality.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge a few people who have been important in the formulating of this booklet. I've mentioned John Largen and Pastor Josh Ferris. I'd also like to acknowledge the many spirituality groups I have encountered throughout the years, especially twelve-step fellowships and the meditation groups I engaged with at Luther College. This booklet wouldn't have been a possibility without all the people mentioned and so many more. I'm thankful that God has led me to the people and places I have encountered.

So here we are, at the other side of the booklet. Did you enjoy trying these practices? If yes, hurrah! I'm glad you were able to take something away from these pages. If not, that's ok. I hope you don't give up and continue searching for a program that can help you feel closer to God.

My intent for this book is that we will use it through our Thursday services in Lent, while also allowing you take it home with you to continue exploring your spiritual connection with God. My true hope is that we all continue to explore spiritual discipline beyond the season of these forty days, constantly seeking to know God as intimately as possible on a daily basis.

A few more notes now that you have tried some of these practices:

In the introduction to this booklet, I wrote about *Time*, *Presence*, and *Intention*. I really can't stress enough how important these three aspects of spiritual practice are. You'll notice that each practice outlined in this book need all three for them to work.

If you're feeling like your practice is not making any changes in your life, first have patience. Spiritual progress is a hurry-up-and-wait kind of thing; you work for a long time without much progress, and then suddenly you see a major change in a short amount of time. Remember that there are no ulterior motives in spiritual practice. The only goal or outcome is to feel a closer presence to God in your daily life. If this sounds like a nebulous ideal, it is. "Closer to God" looks different for everybody. Part of the fun is discovering what that means for you as an individual child of God.

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— American Proverb

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SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP

Walking the Journey with Another

“My first spiritual director didn’t know he was a spiritual director. He had never so much as heard the term spiritual director, and neither had I. But our mutual ignorance of terminology did not prevent the work.”

— Eugene H. Peterson

Throughout this booklet, you will see all kinds of suggestions for ideas of how to grow closer to God. If you take nothing out of these pages other than this, it will have been worth the work: God does not care *exactly* how you cultivate a relationship, just that you put in the work to be closer to God.

There are many times in our lives when we feel distant from God and wonder if God is really all loving, all powerful, and all knowing. Even when we start a spiritual program, these thoughts seep in and make us doubt the work we have done and the insights we have gained.

Thus, it becomes important to know that we do not walk this path with God alone. When it feels like God has deserted us, who is beside us?

As the quote above states, spiritual direction is important, but it need not come from a spiritual director. If working with trained clergy is important to you, then by all means, take advantage of your parish pastor, or reach out to other local clergy who are willing to help. But know that spiritual growth does not need to happen with someone who has been trained. Sometimes it is better to simply agree with a friend or family member to support each other with prayer and conversation along the way.

Creating a Rule of Life:

1. Try out some of the spiritual practices outlined in this book. Know what works for you and what doesn’t. Allow yourself to stretch and grow as you try new things.
2. As you prepare to make changes in your life, consider your schedule as you follow it throughout your day. What parts can be removed or shortened? What could you emphasize in place of what you already focus on.
3. Write a schedule for the average day you have now. Seeing this on paper will help with the process of #2 above.
4. Experiment on paper with where you can move time around in your day. Can you take 15 minutes for Centering Prayer when you would have mindlessly scrolled through Facebook at lunch? Can you wake up half an hour earlier and read a devotion and journal before breakfast?
5. Ask others who use a Rule of Life for suggestions.
6. After you have decided on a Rule, write out the new schedule you want to aspire to. Share it with your Spiritual Friend for accountability. Ask them to share theirs with you.
7. Follow the Rule you have created as well as you can. Know that if things change, or you notice something is not working out, you can try to modify the Rule as much as needed.

As I write this, I realize that what I am writing may seem dramatic. A Rule of Life could mean a dramatic change. But on the other hand, simply adding fifteen minutes a day here, and thirty minutes a day there can lead to major changes over the long term. Spirituality is not meant to be a one-and-done experience. Try your best to cultivate a true change through intentional time with God.

RULE OF LIFE

Creating a Program for Spiritual Living

“We use specific rules and practice certain disciplines in order to come to the point where the very experiences of our daily life are the means and the place of our consummate union with God... Ultimately our rule should yield and blend into the spontaneous flow of our life.”

— William Wilson

Throughout this booklet, we have explored fourteen practices that shape our experience and understanding of our lives with God. The list of these practices is only the beginning. As I said in the introduction, one can mix and match and blend practices in any number of ways, finding opportunities to explore how faith, community, and context mesh together in the individual and the relationship to God.

Creating a Rule of Life is an intentional attempt to make this happen. We are not setting out in this practice to create a rule like that of St. Benedict, which called for prayer at specific times throughout the day and legislated how one exists in a community of Christ. (Although if that is the kind of discipline you like in your life, by all means- go for it!) This Rule of Life is a gentle structure reminding you to work the practice of spirituality into a daily function in your life.

This will most likely mean changing some of your habits, since many of us believe our lives are too full to accommodate new action. Remember: the focus of a spiritual life is on God through Christ. If certain parts of your life need to move and readjust to allow God to be the center of your being, you will be all the better for it!

Considerations for deciding on a Spiritual Friend:

1. Know the work that you are asking a Spiritual Friend to undertake on this walk with you:
 - a. A Spiritual Friend listens to us.
 - b. A Spiritual Friend helps us notice our spiritual tendencies.
 - c. A Spiritual Friend helps us respond to God’s love.
 - d. A Spiritual Friend points us to practical disciplines of spiritual growth.
 - e. A Spiritual Friend loves us and prays for us.
2. Look for the qualities you want in a Spiritual Friend:
 - a. Is this person mature in his or her own faith? Is this person willing to grow in maturity?
 - b. Does this person show humility?
 - c. Is this person an attentive and patient listener?
 - d. Will this person keep my confidence?
 - e. Does this person put faith and trust in God?
3. Understand how this relationship will function:
 - a. What kind of relationship do you want?
 - b. What will be the frequency/ length of meetings?
 - c. How will the meetings be structured?
 - d. How will you evaluate spiritual growth?
4. Know the boundaries of your conversations:
 - a. What topics are allowed or off limits?
 - b. How do you navigate your sense of God in dialogue?
 - c. What happens if you disagree on something fundamental to your understanding of faith?
5. Don’t give up if a Spiritual Friendship doesn’t work with someone right away. Sometimes conflict can lead to even deeper understanding, and sometimes moving on to another person helps you get closer to that which God is calling you.

CENTERING PRAYER

Quiet Time with God

“Silence is the language of God,
all else is poor translation.”
— Jalaluddin Rumi

Silence is uncomfortable for us. We're taught that meaning comes through language and objects: the words and actions that serve as the building blocks of our lives.

Centering Prayer teaches us to let go of words, images, concepts, and emotions. It helps us to see that the things with which we fill our lives- the things we are attached to- become our ultimate concern. Centering prayer is a method of learning to detach from our thoughts and be filled with the reality of God, truly as God is, beyond what our words and concepts can imagine.

Elijah knew this side of a relationship with God. In 1 Kings 19, as Elijah is fleeing persecution, God shows strength through a firestorm and whirlwind, but only approaches Elijah in the space of deep silence. As we enter this deep silence, we trust that God is stirring within us, more deeply than we will ever consciously know, and that as we rest in comfort with God, we will be refreshed by the relationship we cultivate.

There is no shortcut, no substitute for giving time to the practice of prayer. If at first this feels uncomfortable, know that just as you took multiple falls as you learned to walk and again as you learned to ride a bike, we learn best by the process of doing, failing, and trying again. As you learn to build a relationship with God through silence, you will become comfortable setting more and more time away for this practice.

Conducting a Fast:

1. Depending only upon personal willpower is dangerous in all areas of our life, but especially when conducting a fast. A fast for spiritual purposes must be centered on God. Using other spiritual practices is a good way to prepare for a fast.
2. There are three types of fast- a normal fast, a partial fast, and an absolute fast. A normal fast abstains from all food, but allows water. A partial fast restricts the diet, but does not call for complete abstinence. An absolute fast removes food and water, restricting all intake.
3. Ease into fasting. A beginner should not conduct an absolute fast for a week right out of the gate. Instead, start with a partial fast for one day a week and over the course of a few months work up in intensity and frequency as you practice. Make sure you have a specific timeframe and scope decided in advance.
4. When you feel pangs of hunger or desires for food, fill the emptiness with a prayer, or a scripture reading, or another contemplative practice. Remember that the emptiness you feel is an allegory for the emptying of the self in relation to God. Fill your hunger with God's love.

Non-Food Fasting:

1. Decide from what you will fast and for how long you will conduct the fast.
2. If you can, remove all access points to that which you are fasting from. (i.e. deleting a phone app or throwing away old magazines.)

When you feel an urge to use the object from which you are fasting, fill that urge with prayer, scripture, or another spiritual practice.

FASTING

Emptying for the Sake of Being Filled

“St. Augustine once said that God is always trying to give good things to us, but our hands are too full to receive them... And not only our hands, but also our hearts, minds, and attention are clogged.”
— Gerald May

Much of our lives are filled with filling. We fill ourselves with work to be done, objects to be had, people to be with, and places to go. Many times, pursuit of these things covers up a need to fill ourselves with God. We feel emotionally and spiritually empty, and we think *things* can address these feelings.

Thus, intentionally emptying ourselves of these distractions becomes an important step in our journey with God. By becoming empty of those things that will fill our lives with, we enter into a physical and spiritual place of dependence on God.

While traditional fasting deals specifically with food, there are a whole host of things we can fast from. Many people today fast from social media, television, the 24 hour news cycle, gossip, over functioning at work, etc. The list goes on and on. If you are not able to fast from food, there are many alternatives.

Fasting can become unhealthy if practiced incorrectly. Spiritual fasting is meant to be used for spiritual growth. If you feel tempted to use a fast for other motives, do not embark on this journey at that time. Please consult a doctor as you discern if (and how) fasting is the best option for you.

Entering Silence with God:

1. Set aside time with God. Use a part of your day when you feel active and energized. Use a gentle timer or alarm to keep the amount of time you want to spend with God.
2. Adjust the position of your body. Find a posture you can hold without much effort. Sitting straight up and down, with your feet firmly planted on the floor and your back free from a rest is a good way to start. Either close your eyes completely, or let your gaze drift downward to the floor. Rest your hands gently in your lap.
3. As you drift into silence, listen. At first you will hear distractions. Beneath those distractions, as you rest in God, you will hear a word or a phrase from God. Gently hear and repeat that phrase as distractions come and go.
4. Breathe at a pace comfortable to you. You will find the longer you stay in silence, the deeper and more restful your breathing pattern will become.
5. Don't be ashamed if you fall asleep. Resting in God means entering into relationship with all that we carry, including our fatigue.
6. As your time ends, you may find it helpful to return from silence by saying a prayer of thanks, using your word or phrase to guide your conversation with God. Or you may desire to finish with a rote prayer, such as the Lord's Prayer.
7. If you have time, this may be a segue into another practice found in this booklet.

Centering prayer is like drifting down a creek in a canoe. The current of our spirit leads us through the space, and our words from God help us steer away from the shore and debris in our way. There is no specific destination, just a process of gentle movement.

KEEPING SABBATH

Holy Leisure

“So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

— Genesis 2:3

A country music song features the lyrics: “Sunday was a day of rest/ Now it’s one more day for progress.” Our Jewish brothers and sisters take Saturdays off from work to spend time in worship and fellowship. The idea of taking an entire day from work is becoming more and more antiquated as the years drag on.

Keeping Sabbath historically has been tied to a specific day. However, I wonder if we can consider this concept without thinking about Saturday or Sunday. Sabbath in Hebrew literally means *to stop, to cease, to keep*. Just as God stopped on the seventh day of creation, so were the Old Testament Jews told to rest one day a week. But the Sabbath did not end there. There were Sabbath years, when Hebrew farmers would have to take a year to allow the fields to rest. And at the end of a certain cycle, there was a special Sabbath year called the Jubilee year.

Sabbath became a part of the rhythm of life for the people of the Old Testament. They knew the importance of a resting/working balance. We seem to have lost balance in our daily living. This booklet itself is a response to a sense of loss of Sabbath.

The next page does not lay out a specific practice, like other sections of this booklet. Rather, it is an invitation to explore the meaning of Sabbath in a new way.

Using the Stations of the Cross:

1. While the Stations can be meditated on through words only, it may be helpful to acquire pictures depicting the Stations to help guide meditation. Having more explanation of each Station may be helpful as well.
2. Follow the outlines used in the Iconography section of this booklet.
3. The modern Stations of the Cross are as follows:
 - i. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane;
 - ii. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested;
 - iii. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin;
 - iv. Jesus is denied by Peter;
 - v. Jesus is judged by Pilate;
 - vi. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns;
 - vii. Jesus takes up his cross;
 - viii. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross;
 - ix. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem;
 - x. Jesus is crucified;
 - xi. Jesus promises his kingdom to the repentant thief;
 - xii. Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other;
 - xiii. Jesus dies on the cross;
 - xiv. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

The hope of a practice such as this is to experience love and compassion from God through the actions Christ took on our behalf. Unlike some popular depictions of Christ’s death (i.e., Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ*), This is not an exercise in morbidity, but in gratitude and love.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus

“When the range and depth of the suffering of others and what we do to one another no longer bothers us, nor moves us to remedy the situation and stop the pain, then we have lost a part of our own humanity, our own soul.”

— Megan McKenna

The Stations of the Cross is a specific iconographic practice that has been used since the early days of Christianity. It originally started as a process in which people would journey to and through Jerusalem to experience the geographic areas in which Jesus experienced his passion. Anyone who has been to current-day Jerusalem knows that this is a practice that happens often. People who have been to the supposed sites in which Jesus suffered report they have a new appreciation for what his sacrifice means to them.

For those of us who can't make it to Jerusalem, practicing the Stations of the Cross is a helpful alternative. In this practice, we use icons to meditate on the journey Jesus took from the Garden of Gethsemane to the tomb, exploring his betrayal, trial, beatings, walk through Jerusalem, crucifixion, and death. We consider the thoughts Jesus may have had, the pain he endured, and the love that moved him to this course of action.

Traditionally, there are fourteen Stations of the Cross, although some have simplified them to twelve, for theological and practical reasons. Eight of the stations are based on the accounts of the Gospels, while the others are apocryphal. The Stations presented here are a modernized version approved by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007.

Sabbath is:

1. Joyful refreshment in God, from which we draw strength in our working hours;
2. Surrender to God's will and God's course of action;
3. *Otium Sanctum* (holy leisure), the core of spiritual practice, in which the Spirit works within us;
4. A healthy boundary between our efforts in the world and our work for God's kingdom;
5. A radical choice in our culture;
6. The realization that we are loved by God, not because of what we do, but because of who God is;
7. Celebration in God's creating force.

Sabbath is not:

1. An excuse to be slothful or lazy;
2. Attempts to place responsibility for our spiritual growth only on God's shoulders;
3. A work that we can do alone- we rely on Christ to be with us.

Shifting to Understanding Sabbath anew:

1. Acknowledge how you have been conditioned to ignore rest by our culture.
2. Give yourself permission to carve out regular time with God, whether on one specific day, or in small increments through the week.
3. Free yourself from people pleasing, and open yourself to God's love. “The more I am aware of God's love for me, the less I live my life trying to please people.”
4. Create positive feedback loops that help you continue on a journey toward reliance on God.

LECTIO DIVINA

Prayer of the Listening Heart

“Do not ask ‘How shall I pass this on?’ but ‘What does it say to me?’
Then ponder this Word long in your heart until it has gone right into you
and taken possession of you.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Lectio Divina is a practice that has been used by Christians for millennia. Rather than reading for information, as one would with a newspaper or an office memo, *Lectio Divina* invites one to read in a contemplative manner. This way of reading opens our hearts and minds to how God intends us to understand a given scripture in the context of our lives. We consider not only *what* the scripture says, but *how* it affects us and *where* this understanding fits in our relationship with God.

As you begin, try a short story from the Gospel of your choice. As you become more comfortable with this form, try moving to the Psalms or other Wisdom literature. This practice can work with all kinds of writing, although certain scripture is easier to engage for beginners.

Lectio Divina follows four distinct movements, which we will introduce and discuss. These four movements are laid out in order, but can be influenced as the spirit leads the individual. For example, it may make more sense to pray for understanding of a difficult scripture before meditating on the scripture. Listen to how God is leading you, and feel free to engage the movements as they make sense to you.

Each of the movements are presented here in their Latin origination. If Latin is intimidating to you, add an “n” to the end of each word, and you will discover its English equivalent.

Using Icons as a Vessel for Spiritual Contemplation:

1. Identify the icon you wish to use. It may be helpful to start with an image that is more familiar, such as a secular piece of art, or a more popular religious image. Use a picture or a model sculpture rather than the screen image of a computer or phone.
2. Enter into silence and contemplation, asking God to guide your thought and meditation. Relax your body, soften your eyesight, so that you are not examining the image, but rather allowing the image to speak to you.
3. Let the icon guide you. What do you notice in the image itself? What does this noticing convey about your relationship with God?
4. When your mind wanders, simply note your awareness of the distraction and return to the icon.
5. It may help to repeat an appropriate prayer phrase as you look upon the icon, but it is not necessary. It is enough simply to watch and be present.
6. Search for God’s voice in your meditation. Listen attentively to what is coming up in your conscious awareness during your time with the icon.
7. After you have spent time with a certain icon, it may help to do some research on it. Who is depicted? How does the artist use symbolism to convey a theological message? Questions such as these may help guide meditation and understanding.

This practice of iconography can be uncomfortable, or may be easy to enter into. How you encounter this practice is mostly about your experience with visuals throughout your life. Even someone who has spent years in artistic fields may struggle to use icons in this new way. Be faithfully patient as you try this meditation. God will reach out to you in ways you cannot fathom.

ICONOGRAPHY

Incarnational Images

“Iconography, good iconography, strives to convey invisible reality in a visible form.”

— Peter Pearson

Due to the nature of our sin, we often act like Satan in the story of Jesus’ temptation, improperly applying God’s words to support our selfish desires. The protestant tradition has fallen into this trap by using the first commandment to do away with reverence of holy images.

The movement of the reformers away from religious iconography was twofold: it was a way to protect the first commandment and stay away from placing objects of reverence above God, but also served as a political statement of us versus them, an act of theologically throwing the baby out with the bathwater when it came to separating from the Catholic Church.

That being said, iconography used well offers the same benefits of any spiritual practice- placing the practitioner in an awareness of his or her place in the world and in relation to God. Religious icons are rightly seen as a vessel- the finger pointing at the moon rather than the moon itself.

Religious iconography can come in many forms. It can be seen in stained glass windows of churches, sprawling paintings in Rome, pocket-sized images of Christ and the saints. Iconography can also be experienced through secular works of art, sculptures, and music. Remember, the object is not important; it simply serves as a vessel toward a closer relationship to God.

The four movements of *Lectio Divina*:

1. *Lectio*- The scripture is read at least once. Unlike simply reading for information, this reading is filled with expectation for the coming movements, opening the heart and mind to the possibilities of God’s revelation to the reader.
2. *Meditatio*- The reader meditates. This meditation can take many forms; the reader can imagine him/herself as a character in the story, focus on a word or phrase from the reading, or consider the lesson being taught through the reading. The grounding question for this meditation is *What is God speaking to me through this reading?*
3. *Oratio*-The reader prays. This prayer flows naturally out of the previous practice of meditation. As the reader considers his or her relation to the text and God’s word coming through the text, the reader responds prayerfully, with whatever emotion comes to the fore.
4. *Contemplatio*- The reader rests. After considering the word coming from God, and responding in prayer, the reader spends time simply enjoying the time spent with God. This is the meaning of Sabbath for us during this time. After the time of *oratio* has been played out in its fury, angst, exuberance, fear, melancholy, or glee, the reader rests in knowledge of and faith in God.

Consider the cow: first she eats grass (*Lectio*), then sits and chews her cud (*meditatio*), until both milk (*oratio*) and cream (*contemplatio*) are extracted from the food. When we engage *Lectio Divina*, we are like the cow, chewing on God’s word until we digest and process its use in our lives. (Image from Basil Pennington.)

WALKING MEDITATION

Taking the Metaphor Literally

“There is nothing in the world as delightful as a continual walk with God.”

— Brother Lawrence

We are a society that always seems to be going somewhere, but often we do not know where, why, or how. We fill our days with errands that must be run, missions that have certain objectives. While these missions help us structure our days, we tend to go on autopilot, retreating into a posture of mindlessness as we check yet another task off our to-do list.

Sometimes, we find ourselves filling our list with so many things that we lose track of time, ourselves, and our objective, ensuring that our missions will be left incomplete, for the anxiety of completion to trickle over into the next day.

We can frame a question here: *do we have hold on our lives, or do our lives have hold on us?* Do we act in our lives in an autonomous way, rising above the to-dos, or do we find ourselves caught in a never-ending bogged-downedness? Living a spiritual life is an attempt to partner with God in seeing our lives as more than completing one event after another.

The walking meditation is an attempt to take hold on one aspect of our lives: travel. This is not a meditation that can happen through the means of other transportation. This is a meditation specifically meant to be embodied by the physical means of walking. It is unstructured time to take stock in how we use our bodies in our daily lives.

A process for conducting a Life Review:

1. Identify a theme that you want to explore in your life review. If you have multiple themes, label one sheet of paper with each theme you want to explore.
2. Ask God to guide you through this process, to strengthen you and support you as you explore difficult parts of your life.
3. Take one theme and recall the first time it came up in your life. As you remember instances of this theme throughout your life, identify each in one sentence. Use “I” language to take ownership of your thoughts and feelings.
4. After you have listed all you can remember, explore your *Feelings*, the *Effect* of the situation, and your *Contribution*:

Theme: I lied to my kindergarten teacher about my parents signing a note about my bad behavior in class.

Feelings: I was afraid I would get in trouble. I was angry that I got a note when my friend didn't. I felt ashamed of being caught.

Effect: I learned to lie to try to get out of trouble. I learned to defend myself to everyone all the time. I acted out in false pride.

Contribution: I blamed others when I was responsible for my own behavior. I lied when being honest was the right thing to do.

5. If at any time you feel bogged down by guilt or shame, create a gratitude list of positive themes you have identified.
6. Pray over each list, sharing with God what you have found, and asking for help in letting go of burdens and bolstering positives.
7. Share each list with your Spiritual Friend, relative, or church official. Ask them to share God's forgiveness with you. (1 John 1:8-10)

LIFE REVIEW

Uncovering Long-Term Patterns

“[We] made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. Admitted to God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

— The Fourth and Fifth Steps of A.A.

Each step of Alcoholics Anonymous evokes a spiritual system. Anyone who is familiar with that program has already seen the parallels between practices explored in this booklet and step work. Rather than being simply a parallel to the fourth and fifth step, this Life Review is directly adapted from the steps.

The earlier discussion of conscience and consciousness is important when we discuss this Life Review process. While the Examen focuses on daily consciousness, this process considers long-term conscience. The Life Review can be undertaken after the Examen brings to light a pattern of behavior you were not aware of, and want to explore in a longer time frame. The first part of the life review explores where we have been off-base spiritually, which may or may not have led to immoral behavior. In expressing wrongs to another person through the process of confession, the second part is directly rooted in conscience.

To avoid becoming bogged down in the negative, there is also room for acknowledging strengths and celebrating gifts, as this helps us see ourselves holistically as God sees us, in our good and bad.

In this practice, we will see what we have done, make a deliberate choice in regard to behavior, and ask God’s and another person’s help in living well.

Suggestions for Walking Meditation:

1. **Location-** Find a place where you will be free to roam as the spirit leads you. This may mean a sidewalk in your neighborhood, a local park, or a hiking trail. Different settings lead to various experiences with the divine. Your goal is not to *arrive*, but rather to *experience*.
2. **Speed-** While this aspect of the meditation is relative to each individual, you should consider walking at a pace slightly slower than your normal pace. Strides should be shorter and less frequent than what is typical for you.
3. **Posture-** You can do with your hands and arms what seems most comfortable. Try to find a position of holding your body that is comfortable, and that you don’t have to put too much thought into.
4. **Consciousness-** As you walk, become mindful of something you would usually take for granted, such as your breath traveling through your nose into your lungs, the sounds of your feet on the ground, or how your shoulders, neck, and head align. Notice your surroundings in a way you usually ignore.
5. **Noticing the Steps-** As you walk, step naturally, but notice each of four components of your step: 1) the lifting of one foot; 2) the movement of that foot through the air; 3) the placing of the foot on the ground, heel first; 4) the shifting of the weight of the body onto the forward leg as the back heel lifts and begins the process again.

For many people, slow, formal walking meditation is an acquired taste. But the more you practice, the more it is likely to grow on you. As you practice this mindfulness, you will start to be aware of yourself and your surroundings as you have not before. You will start to notice a new sense of place in creation. Be sure to thank God for this awareness in the course of your meditation.

LOVING KINDNESS

Meditation of Goodwill

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

— Jesus

We all know people, places, and things that simply drive us crazy. No matter what kind of force or will we try to exert on these things in our lives, we find ourselves frustrated, angry, annoyed, and hurt. These stressors may be colleagues and bosses at work, our spouse and children at home, other drivers in traffic on the commute, and even your pastor, intern, and fellow congregants at church. The stressor could be circumstances which are outside your control, such as a promotion process that seems unfair, or the general state of our society. Whatever the specific, we all know someone, something, or somewhere that we simply despise.

The Loving Kindness Meditation shifts the negative energy of hurt and pain into a productive practice of cultivating compassion and empathy. As compassion and empathy grow in our hearts, we will see our actions follow suit. Patience will take the place of stress.

This practice can be done in formal meditation, such as in conjunction with Centering Prayer, or it can be done on the move, as a reminder in a stressful situation that God loves the one creating stress, and that we are called to that love as well.

This meditation can also be used to deepen the love and commitment toward those we already respect and admire.

The Five-Steps of the Examen:

1. Invitation- As you enter into this time of reflection, pray that God will join you in reflecting on your day. Ask for the strength to look at the day as God would, seeing both positive and negative aspects of your day, without becoming over-elated or self-critical.
2. Gratitude- Give thanks for another day. Allow your mind to wander through the events of the day and remember those things that you are grateful for. Lift this gratitude to God in prayer.
3. Review- Again let your mind wander through your day. During this reflection, pay attention to when you felt closest to God, and when you felt most distant. Reflect on why those feelings of closeness or distance may have come up when they did.
4. Presence- Hold what has surfaced in your heart. Allow God to sift through it with you. Is God affirming your action? Is God calling you to a change of heart? Jotting these moments of awareness in a journal may help you remember God’s presence more concretely in your life, and help you see progress over time.
5. Resolve- Pray that you will be more aware of God’s presence in the upcoming day, that you would be able to more closely reflect what God is calling you to.

If during any of these steps, you feel yourself moving from consciousness to conscience, lift that feeling to God, and continue to move through the process. It is not wrong to have feelings of pride or guilt when reflecting on your day, but that is not the focus of this practice. As you move toward the final step, consider praying for that conscience feeling again.

DAILY EXAMEN

Cultivating Consciousness

“Self-examination is not morbid introspection or self-condemnation, but the honest, fearless confrontation of the self, and its abandonment to God in trust.”
— Kenneth Leech

It is important for us to draw a distinction between conscience and consciousness. *Conscience* is the guilt or pride we feel in regard to morality and the actions we take in life. *Consciousness* is the state of being aware of oneself and his or her place in the world. Both conscience and consciousness are important for a life of faith. And both must be cultivated. But if we confuse the two, we can find ourselves missing important aspects of each.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order of Catholic priests, famously laid out this five step process toward consciousness of God in our lives. While the reflection upon shortcomings is an important and necessary part of this practice, in the Examen we focus on our existence in relation to God. (Don't worry; we'll get to conscience soon!) St. Ignatius suggested the Examen be done at the end of each day, for about 10-15 minutes.

As we learn to be reflective of our relationship with God, we begin to notice God working in our lives not only in the evening as we reflect on our day, but in the moment that God is acting on us. This practice of the Examen cultivates consciousness- it helps us see and feel God in every moment of our lives, and thus helps us remember who we are in the grand scheme of our lives, creation, and God's plan.

A Prayer of Loving Kindness:

1. Take a few moments to relax into God using the guidelines for Centering Prayer.
2. Begin by sharing Loving Kindness with yourself, speaking or thinking these words as you breathe out:

May I be filled with Loving Kindness.

May I be healthy and strong.

May I be free of pain and suffering.

May I be safe and protected.

**May I be able to live in this world happily,
joyfully, with ease.**

**May I know God's love, and may God's love
know me.**

3. You may feel the need to repeat this process with yourself a few more times. Allow the phrases simply to channel the force of Loving Kindness.
4. Start with a person you feel deep love toward. Place their name in the meditation:

May _____ be filled with Loving Kindness...

5. Move methodically from people you hold in high esteem, to those you are in greatest conflict with. Repeat the mantras for each individual until you feel peace.
6. Broaden your scope to include all of creation: the environment, and God's creatures. Expand your loving kindness until you are able to visualize Earth, spinning within the vast, mysterious universe. If you like, continue expanding the sense of your loving kindness, filling the endless emptiness of the universe.
7. Finish in the silence and meditation of the Centering Prayer.

BREATH PRAYER

God's Work in our Subconscious

“The Spirit heals the wounds of our fragile human nature at a level beyond our psychological perception.”

— Thomas Keating

There are two ways that spiritual practices affect us. The first is the intentional, mindful time we set aside to be with God. This is time when we are most aware of the presence of God in our lives. The second is the work God does behind the scenes in our souls, beyond our awareness. Spiritual practices cultivate both these methods of growth.

This is especially true when it comes to breath prayers. Breath prayers are a way for us to plant seeds in those deepest furrows of our souls, allowing God to cultivate the subconscious.

The fundamental idea of breath prayers is to pray constantly. This means learning to pray as we breathe, sometimes consciously, but usually without thought. This makes Paul's exhortation to “pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17) possible. We cannot be in conscious contact with God at all times and in all places. But we can pray and breathe in the depths of our souls, where conscious thought does not traverse.

The most popular breath prayer is the Jesus prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This prayer reminds us of four things: 1) who Jesus is; 2) who we are; 3) what Christ does for us; 4) how we respond to grace. Taking from that formula, here are a few examples of breath prayers and guide of how to create a personal prayer for your meditative use.

Writing a Verbatim with God:

1. Set aside a good amount of time. Write the encounter with God in one sitting if possible.
2. Center yourself as you feel comfortable to do. Ask through prayer that God will guide your conversation and understanding.
3. Begin by imagining the setting of this conversation. Briefly write or draw the way you interact with the setting through your senses. Imagine the time, place, how God looks, how you feel, what you are doing.
4. As you record your conversation, do so as if you were writing a script. Don't think too hard about what you or God say in response to each other- just let the words flow out.
5. Pay special attention to the emotions that are present. Make notes of them throughout the conversation.
6. After you have come to a place where the conversation has concluded, reflect upon your conversation. Look back through what you have read. Consider a few questions:
 - a. What emotions were you experiencing as you were writing the verbatim? What emotions do you experience as you reflect?
 - b. During which parts of the conversation did you feel close to God? During which parts of conversation did you feel distant?
 - c. What is God conveying to you through this conversation?
 - d. What have you learned from this experience?
7. Enter a time of contemplation and rest, thanking God for the experience of this conversation.

Consider sharing this verbatim with your Spiritual Friend, or someone you trust who may help you explore God's words to you.

VERBATIM WITH GOD

A Special Conversation

“When many voices are speaking at once, listen to the one most quiet and gentle. That’s the one worth listening to.”
— Miranda Linda Weisz

When I was training as a hospital chaplain, we would write verbatims- a unique type of case report. We would start by presenting patient demographics, setting, and context of the visit. As we moved to the encounter with the patient, we captured everything we could remember, writing line-by-line the dialogue and emotion of the visit. After this dialogue, we filled out more information summing up the visit and putting forward theories as to why the patient and the chaplain interacted in the way they did.

Many chaplains in training focus their first verbatims to reflect on and explore the patient’s motivation. But after a few times through this process, a seasoned chaplain starts to understand that the verbatim is more reflective of the chaplain than the patient. The process of presenting and debriefing a verbatim becomes a vehicle for looking inward and understanding the chaplain’s internal sense of self and God.

A Verbatim with God is a specialized form of this exercise that is reminiscent of Spiritual Journaling. It is a process in which the writer imagines a conversation with God. A popular example of this kind of conversation is *The Shack* by Wm. Paul Young. Your verbatim can be elaborate as this novel, or it can be simpler- a single conversation without much imagery. The important thing is that you are open to the words God speaks to you through the process, no matter what difficult emotion may come up.

Examples of Breath Prayers:

Holy Spirit, fill me.
Give me strength, O Christ.
Father, show me your love.
Teach me patience, gracious God.
My God and my All.
Come, Lord Jesus!

You can see that each of these prayers is only a few words long. With constant repetition, these words have the power to shift our souls into a more reliant and faithful relationship with God.

Creating a personal Breath Prayer:

1. Enter a contemplative silence (using Centering Prayer or similar practice).
2. Visualize Jesus with you, asking what you want him to do for you. Allow this question to plunge to the depths of your soul. Wait for a clear answer.
3. Identify how you normally address God in prayer. (Father, Jesus, Holy One, etc.)
4. Combine your preferred salutation to God with the desire you have for Jesus to work in your life. Use as few words as possible, that feel natural and is easy to remember.

After you have found comfortable phrasing, start by speaking it out loud as you exhale, softening your voice the longer you repeat. After you have done this for a number of minutes, recite the statement in your brain, noticing as it fills your mind. Again, after a number of minutes, imagine the statement moving out of your head, down your neck, into your chest, and resting in your heart. Continue to repeat the statement as you notice it filling your heart and radiating through your veins into your entire body.

SPIRITUAL JOURNALING

Recording Our Souls

“The pages afforded glimpses into my soul where I'd hidden it, behind masks of paper and ink.”
— Rachel L. Schade

Spiritual Journaling is perhaps the most difficult practice to claim stands alone. My hope is that as you have been trying practices in this book you have noticed how related they are to each other. As I stated in the introduction, these practices inform each other and build upon each other, while sharing some aspects, but ultimately standing alone. Spiritual Journaling may be the only practice we discuss in this booklet that can simply absorb itself into any other practice.

Spiritual Journaling is as simple as it sounds. It is the practice of writing down what you experience as spiritual throughout the day. You can journal while you feel the hunger pangs of fasting. You can journal after you have completed the Examen. You can journal as you are hearing inspiration in Lectio Divina. You can journal to get into or out of Centering Prayer. Spiritual journaling can be a deep plunge into one specific theme, as in the Life Review, or it can be a gentle skim over the surface of a pond, taking short glimpses at the events of a day, a week, a month, a year.

There are only two requirements for spiritual journaling: 1) to date your entries, 2) to write about spiritual content. This is simply so that one can look back and see the progress into a spiritual way of being. A diary tells the events of a day. A Spiritual Journal speaks of the movement of the writer in relation to God. The rest is mere suggestion.

Suggestions for Spiritual Journaling:

1. Enter your time of journaling as you would any other practice, present to God with intention. If you do not want to use a prompt, simply spend the first part of your time listening for what God is laying on your heart.
2. Choose the way you want to use your journal. Format it to reflect this choice. Consider using only handwritten journal to foster the relationship between spirit, mind and body.
3. Write quickly, staying open to the stream of consciousness that comes with putting pen to paper. Write everything that comes, regardless of logic or composition.
4. Do not be afraid to write the difficult things that arise. Anger, sadness, pain are all part of a walk with God. God can handle those emotions, and God will help you do the same. (If needed, share your journal with a pastor or a Spiritual Friend to help carry the burden.)
5. Write naturally.

How often should you write? How often should you do spiritual practices? When starting out, it is easier to write or pray, or join in any other practice when you feel the spirit move you. As you become more comfortable, trying every day is important. This moves the action from the realm of spiritual practice to spiritual discipline. If you find yourself resistant in the time you have set aside to prayer or writing, pray and write about that resistance.

God can and will use every part of you and your journey for your edification. Peace be with you as you grow with God!