

Practicing our Faith - The Inward Journey

March 1: Prayer

Matthew 6:1-15

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, he offers them a simple prayer that is in no way simplistic. We can pray this prayer a thousand times and never reach its depths.

The Practice

Take some time this week to pray the Lord's Prayer slowly and intentionally. Or, choose one phrase each day to ponder and repeat throughout the day.

To Go Deeper

- ♦ *Lord, Teach Us* by Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas
- ♦ *The Centering Moment* by Howard Thurman
- ♦ *Prayer* by Richard Foster
- ♦ *The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father (Christian Essentials)* by Wesley Hill (available in church library)
- ♦ *The Greatest Prayer* by John Dominic Crossan
- ♦ *A Place to Pray* by Roberta Bondi

March 8 - Fast to Give

Matthew 6:16-24

Fasting has been a spiritual practice for millenia. The Jewish people had a regular practice of fasting. Jesus and his disciples fasted. John Wesley and the early Methodists fasted two days a week. But fasting can be more than abstaining from food. We can abstain from Facebook, from gossip, from binge-watching Netflix; and we can use that time and energy to pray, to remember our hunger for God, and to remember the hungry in our world.

The Practice

This week, try fasting from a regular habit in your life, perhaps that morning cup of Starbucks coffee or that afternoon smoothie. Consider ways to use some of that discretionary money that might go towards building the kin-dom of God through missions. We encourage you to give money to the Communion Offering for the Guatemala Mission Trip or to the local mission of your choice.

To Go Deeper

- ♦ *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
- ♦ *Fasting* by Scot McKnight

March 15- Centering Prayer

Matthew 6:25-34

Since the earliest days of Christianity, those seeking a deeper connection to the divine have engaged in the practice of contemplative prayer. The word contemplative comes from the Latin *contemplatio*, used to describe the work of mystics who were "gazing at" or "looking to God." In recent Christianity, teachers of the Christian spiritual life have used the term "centering prayer" to describe modes of prayer that encourage us to focus on the very near presence of God.

The Practice

First, choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. Then, sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word.

When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. (directions taken from Thomas Keating, founder of the Contemplative Outreach Network)

To Go Deeper

- ♦ <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/centering-prayer>
- ♦ *The Heart of Centering Prayer* by Cynthia Bourgeault
- ♦ *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer* by Thomas Keating

March 22 - Prayer of Examen

Matthew 7:1-12

The prayer of examen is a prayer practice that gives you the opportunity to reflect deeply on your day or week. In the practice you ask yourself at the end of the day or week several questions and share the answers with God. Through the prayer of examen you can discover a great deal about yourself but also about where God is present in your daily life. We encourage you to give it a try this week. The prayer of examen can be prayed at any time, but in the evening or before bed works well. Try this version adapted from The Way of the Child by Wynn McGregor:

The Practice

Be still and silent. Take a deep breath. Know that God is with you and loves you.

Think back over your day or week. Ask yourself three questions and talk to God about them:

- ♦ What made you happy or glad?
- ♦ What was hard? What made you sad or mad?
- ♦ Is there anything that you are sorry about?

Tell God anything else you want God to know. Listen for anything God might have to say to you. Take a final deep breath, and say Amen.

To Go Deeper

- ♦ Jesuit prayer of examen
<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/jesuit-a-z/terms-e/daily-examen>
- ♦ Upper Room Resource: <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/the-examen>

March 29 - Lectio Divina

Matthew 7:13-14, 24-29

This practice of “holy reading” invites us to read slowly through a passage of scripture several times and allow God room to speak to us in the silence.

The Practice

Follow these steps, reading the passage slowly in between each step:

- ♦ READ the passage slowly, noting any word, phrase or image that rises to your attention.
- ♦ REFLECT on what God may be saying to you through this word, phrase or image.
- ♦ RESPOND by offering your reflection to God on what has been revealed to you.
- ♦ REST in God’s presence.

To Go Deeper

- ♦ <https://spiritualdirection.com/2012/04/21/what-is-lectio-divina-and-will-it-help-my-prayer-life-a-guide-to-lectio-divina>
- ♦ <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures>

Palm Sunday- The Practice of Paying Attention

Matthew 26:36-56

As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he urged his disciples to stay awake and pay attention to what was happening around them. A deeply important practice of our Christian faith is to pay attention, to be present and awake to God in our midst. Our human nature pulls us to ruminate on the past or worry about the future, but God is fully with us in the present moment. Practices of mindfulness and presence can help open our eyes and hearts to see God all around us.

The Practice

Find times throughout your day to stop, take a deep breath and be present to what is right in front of you. Pick a time every day (e.g. eating breakfast, sitting at a certain stoplight) to bring your attention to God’s presence with you.

To Go Deeper

- ♦ *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence
- ♦ *Right Here, Right Now* by Amy Oden

Resources for deeper study on Spiritual Practices

- ♦ *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* by Barbara Brown Taylor
- ♦ *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster
- ♦ *The Spiritual Activist : Practices to Transform your Life, Your Work, and Your World* by Claudia Horwitz

