



**CONNECTED**



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## CONNECTED: LIFE WITH GOD

This is the first of a two-part series exploring different facets and practices of the Christian life. The first part of the series will focus on practices that deepen your personal sense of communion with God while part two of the series will explore practices undertaken Christian community that deepen our connection with others and with God.

### DISCIPLESHIP & OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

At the outset of this study, we ought to be clear about what we mean when we talk about discipleship and our life with God.

Discipleship is the intentional process of our lives being brought into increasing conformity to the life of Jesus. Discipleship involves the transformation of the whole person, so that our loves are cultivated, our beliefs are deepened, our thinking is sharpened, and our agendas are “altered.” Discipleship is Spirit empowered formation into the cross shaped life of Jesus. This life in Jesus begins at our conversion when by God’s grace working through faith our sins are forgiven and we are declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s merit, and we are reconciled to God through the person and work of Jesus. This initial act of justification in Christ, leads way to our sanctification, or our increasing in Christlikeness, which is the focus of discipleship. Sanctification, or the life of discipleship, is only possible because of our life in Christ, and the abiding presence and power of Spirit within us. Growth in godliness occurs through our becoming ever more dependent on God’s grace and work within us.

### DISCIPLESHIP & SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

The spiritual disciplines are ways of expressing our dependence on God and intentionally seeking the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The spiritual disciplines themselves are practices commanded and/or modeled for us in Scripture and passed down by the church as ways of experiencing our with God life so that we are brought into increasing conformity to the life of Jesus. We have reason to believe that Jesus practiced some form of each of the practices that we are going to examine in this first part of the series. As we explore each of these practices, consider how God may be inviting you into a deeper experience of your life in Christ so that you are transformed into the image of His likeness.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended for use in small group contexts, but individuals could benefit from reading, practicing, and reflecting on the disciplines surveyed here. Small groups who elect to use this resource might want to consider using the following structure for group gatherings:

- Opening Discussion - Discuss how each member in the group defines the discipline being examined that week. Ask if anyone has experience with the practice being examined that week.
- Read the key quotes and passages from Scripture – Examine how this practice is portrayed both in the writing of other believers and within the pages of Scripture.
- Discuss Questions: Work through some or all of the suggested questions for reflection and discussion. Do not treat this list of questions as a task to be slavishly followed. Rather after selecting an initial questions all the conversation to develop naturally. As needed go back to the question bank to provide new stimulation to the conversation.
- Suggested Practices: Decide whether there are practices that those in the group want to pursue, either individually or with others. Remember that committing to do something before others adds some healthy accountability for following through.
- Close in prayer

## A NOTE ON FURTHER SOURCES

This guide is adapted in part from *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*, edited by Richard J. Foster & Emilie Griffin. There is a wealth of books and resources aimed at developing our interior life with God. The quotes at the beginning of each section will introduce you to significant voices within the realm of spiritual formation. Other writers of note include Dallas Willard, A. W. Tozer, Jerry Bridges, Eugene Peterson, Andrew Murray, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Miles J. Stanford. When reading these, or any Christian writer, one must read discerningly, holding up the ideas of the author to the truth of Scripture and then evaluate accordingly. While no author (or person!) is perfect, these writers consistently push us to examine the depth of our life with God and deepen our roots in Him, so that we might grow more deeply connected with God and with others.

## LISTENING

"We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him."

Henri Nowen, *Making All Things New*

"Listening comes first. In this life, you listen even before you are aware of it. From within the womb an unborn child is already listening to the voices of her parents...Listening is a practice of focused attention. Hearing is an act of the senses, but listening is an act of the will. In listening you center not only your ears but also your mind, heart and posture on someone or something other than yourself. It is a chosen obedience, like soldiers falling into line the moment their commanding officer calls them to attention."

Adam McHugh, *The Listening Life*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

*Romans 8:22-27*

- <sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he turned to me and heard my cry.
- <sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.
- <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear the LORD  
and put their trust in him.
- <sup>4</sup> Blessed is the one  
who trusts in the LORD,  
who does not look to the proud,  
to those who turn aside to false gods.
- <sup>5</sup> Many, LORD my God,  
are the wonders you have done,  
the things you planned for us.  
None can compare with you;  
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,  
they would be too many to declare.
- <sup>6</sup> Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—  
but my ears you have opened —  
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
- <sup>7</sup> Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—  
it is written about me in the scroll.
- <sup>8</sup> I desire to do your will, my God;  
your law is within my heart."

*Psalms 40:1-8*



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Listening as a spiritual discipline involves several different elements: listening to Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, attentiveness to creation, listening to others, listening to ourselves (self-examination). Which of these elements of listening do you already practice well, in what ways do you need to grow in your practice of listening?
2. How does listening to Scripture play a role in reading and studying Scripture? What would it look like to read or study Scripture and not do so with a posture of listening?
3. Which relationships in your life could be strengthened by developing better habits of listening? Is there a person in your life with whom you are routinely distracted when you engage with them? How can you listen as an act of loving them?
4. How do your habits of media or technology work against developing practices of listening? What might you need to resist in order to better embrace a life of listening?
5. How does the discipline of listening lead naturally and necessarily into a life of obedience to the commands and conformity to the ways of Jesus?
6. What truth lies at the heart of listening and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
7. How do you see listening modeled in the life of Jesus?
8. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Spend time this week alone, in meditation on Scripture, listening for the Spirit to encourage and convict you through his Word.
- Spend time outdoors in a place that you find beautiful. Read Psalm 19 and reflect on how God speaks through creation. Listen to creation and be still before your creator.
- At the start of each day this week, mentally review the people whom you know you will come into contact with. Pray and ask God to give you ears to hear those people in the way He hears them. Picture each of them and imagine listening to them in a way that is humble and compassionate. Think of the way your heavenly father listens to you and ask the Lord to allow you to listen to others in that way. At the close of your day reflect on the people you have spoken with and take a moment to pray for those people the Lord brings to mind.

## MEDITATION

“Meditation” is another word...people often use about prayer. But Christian meditation must not be confused with yoga, Eastern mediation or transcendental meditation. For, unlike these disciplines, Christian meditation has nothing to do with emptying our minds. Christian mediation engages every part of us – our minds, our emotions, our imagination, our creativity and, supremely, our will...We meditate to give God’s words the opportunity to penetrate, not just our minds, but our emotions – the places where we hurt – and our will – the place where we make choices and decisions. We meditate to encounter the Living Word, Jesus himself.”

Joyce Huggett, *Learning the Language of Prayer*

Give me thy grace, good Lord,  
To set the world at nought,  
To set my mind fast upon thee.

Thomas More, *A Godly Meditation*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

- 34 Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees,  
that I may follow it to the end.
- 34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law  
and obey it with all my heart.
- 35 Direct me in the path of your commands,  
for there I find delight.
- 36 Turn my heart toward your statutes  
and not toward selfish gain.
- 37 Turn my eyes away from worthless things;  
preserve my life according to your word.
- 38 Fulfill your promise to your servant,  
so that you may be feared.
- 39 Take away the disgrace I dread,  
for your laws are good.
- 40 How I long for your precepts!  
In your righteousness preserve my life.

*Psalms 119:33-40*

- 5 This is what the LORD says:  
"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,  
who draws strength from mere flesh  
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.
- 6 That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;  
they will not see prosperity when it comes.  
They will dwell in the parched places of the desert,  
in a salt land where no one lives.
- 7 "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,  
whose confidence is in him.
- 8 They will be like a tree planted by the water  
that sends out its roots by the stream.  
It does not fear when heat comes;  
its leaves are always green.  
It has no worries in a year of drought  
and never fails to bear fruit."
- 9 The heart is deceitful above all things  
and beyond cure.  
Who can understand it?
- 10 "I the LORD search the heart  
and examine the mind,  
to reward each person according to their conduct,  
according to what their deeds deserve."

*Jeremiah 17:5-10*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. What are some obstacles to meditation in your life? Consider your home and workplace environments, as well as your church background.
2. What do you think is the difference between silence & solitude and mediation? What similarities are there? How might your practice of one naturally lead into your practice of the other?
3. Teachers of contemplative prayer and meditation counsel us to be detached from the desire for certain kinds of prayer – experiences or special favors from God, in order to be open to what God really wants to send us. What kinds of experience have you set your heart on? Are you ready for whatever God wants?
4. In what realistic ways can you gain benefits from meditation?
5. Have you ever tried setting aside a time of meditation as a way of fixing your thoughts on God and having your mind renewed by Scripture? What obstacles did you encounter, or do you expect to encounter?
6. What truth lies at the heart of meditation and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
7. Where in the life of Jesus do you see something like the practice of meditation modeled?
8. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Schedule a series of visits or an extended time in a place you find conducive to contemplation, such as a chapel, a garden, or a park.
- Choose a text from Scripture that is rich for meditation and contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Read it slowly and thoughtfully two or three times. Turn the text into a prayer to God, praying each phrase back to Him. You may even pause and sit in stillness focusing on a single word or image within the text, turning over in your heart and mind what this truth would look like if it were expressed through your life.
- Try a creative form of meditation based on scriptural storytelling. Choose a familiar scriptural story in which there are a number of characters, such as one of the healings Jesus did. When you meditate, put yourself in the place of various characters in the story, allowing you to imaginatively encounter the person of Jesus as he works in the lives of those around him.

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<sup>1</sup> Consider Psalm 1, 8, 23, 25, 36, 42, 84, 90, 103, 119, 138, 145. Also, look for Paul's prayers at the opening of his letters.

## SILENCE & SOLITUDE

"Jesus calls from loneliness to solitude...Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place...In the midst of noise and confusion we are settled into a deep inner silence...Without silence there is no solitude. Though silence sometimes involves the absence of speech, it always involves the act of listening. Simply to refrain from talking, without a heart listening to God, is not silence."

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

"Plan to take some time off, and give some thought as to what you'd do with that time; hopefully, you'll spend part of it reviewing God's favors to you in the past. What else? Lock up ye olde curiosity shop. Devote more time to reading your spiritual books than your survival manuals. Withdraw from casual conversations and leisurely pursuits. Don't contract for new ventures, and don't gossip about old ones. All these having been done, you'll find more than enough time to undertake a program of meditation. Most of the Saints did just that, avoided collaborative projects whenever they could, choosing instead to spend some private time with God."

Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD;  
he turned to me and heard my cry.  
<sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit,  
out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock  
and gave me a firm place to stand.  
<sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear the LORD  
and put their trust in him.  
<sup>4</sup> Blessed is the one  
who trusts in the LORD,  
who does not look to the proud,  
to those who turn aside to false gods.  
<sup>5</sup> Many, LORD my God,  
are the wonders you have done,  
the things you planned for us.  
None can compare with you;  
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,  
they would be too many to declare.  
<sup>6</sup> Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—  
but my ears you have opened —  
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.  
<sup>7</sup> Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—  
it is written about me in the scroll.  
<sup>8</sup> I desire to do your will, my God;  
your law is within my heart."

*Psalms 40:1-8*



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. How can you structure your daily or weekly routines to allow for some time of silence and solitude at some point(s) in the week? What will point you to God in such times?
2. Which relationships in your life could be strengthened by a time of solitude?
3. What kinds of overactivity affect you? What can you eliminate or reduce in order to better pursue silence and solitude before the Lord?
4. In what realistic ways can you gain benefits from silence and solitude?
5. Have you ever tried setting aside a time of silence as a way of listening to God and to your own heart? What obstacles did you encounter or do you expect to encounter?
6. What truth lies at the heart of solitude and silence and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
7. Where in the life of Jesus do you see something like the practices of solitude and silence modeled?
8. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Set aside time in your weekly schedule for solitude and silence. Target something reasonable, a half hour early in the morning before kids are awake or while they are napping. Open your time by reading a passage of Scripture slowly and thoughtfully. Then in silence listen and imagine the Lord speaking that Scripture to you. Reflect on your relationship with the Lord and the way your relationships with family and friends might be transformed by your time with Lord. Consider journaling your thoughts.
- Set up a prayer space in your home, and plan to use it regularly for a month to six weeks on a specified schedule. Arrange this space with encouragements to prayer.
- If you have not done so, revisit some of the earlier suggest practices and try one of them that requires you to engage with Scripture. The disciplines of silence and solitude, meditation and listening, all work together.

## PRAYER

"To be little *with* God is to be little *for* God. To cut the praying short makes the whole Christian character short, miserly, and slovenly.

E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*

"American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray. We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our bodies screams, "Get to work."

Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

*Ephesians 6:18-20*

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

    " 'Father,  
        hallowed be your name,  
        your kingdom come.  
    Give us each day our daily bread.  
        Forgive us our sins,  
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.  
    And lead us not into temptation.' "

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

*Luke 11:1-9*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Do you view prayer more as a burdensome duty and obligation, or as a gracious opportunity? What can you do help yourself view prayer as a gift of grace?
2. What keeps you from voicing specific prayer requests? Fear, unanswered prayers, discouragement?
3. What worries or sense of deficiency do you have about prayer, or about your prayer life? How can you get beyond such thoughts and engage in the practice of prayer?
4. How do you or could you combine the activities of work and prayer?
5. What truth lies at the heart of prayer and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
6. How do you see the practice of prayer modeled in the life of Jesus?
7. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Interweave an experience of prayer with an experience of work or labor. Pray while running or riding a bike; pray while exercising or lifting weights.
- Pray the Lord's prayer, praying it phrase by phrase or even word by word.
- Pray specifically for someone you know needs the Lord to work in them. Pray wholeheartedly for wholeness to be restored to that person. Send her or him a card or note to say that you are praying for this.
- Choose a prayer place that is especially pleasant for you. Let your prayer bubble up from your natural joy in this place.

## FASTING

"It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive (Matt 6:16-18). To use good things to our own ends is always the sign of false religion."

"More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other good things, but in fasting these things surface."

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

"For in this work, too, a person must take heed that no spirit of self-display creeps in, no craving for human applause, which divides the heart and prevents it from being pure and candid for acquiring knowledge of God...It is evident from these precepts that our entire striving is to be directed towards inward joys, to keep ourselves from seeking outward rewards and becoming conformed to this world and forfeiting the promise of a blessedness which is the more solid and enduring as it is interior, and by which God chose us *to be made conformable to the image of His Son.*"

St. Augustine, *The Lord's Sermon on the Mount*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

3        'Why have we fasted,' they say,  
          'and you have not seen it?  
          Why have we humbled ourselves,  
          and you have not noticed?'

"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please  
          and exploit all your workers.

4        Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,  
          and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
          You cannot fast as you do today  
          and expect your voice to be heard on high.

5        Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,  
          only a day for people to humble themselves?  
          Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed  
          and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?  
          Is that what you call a fast,  
          a day acceptable to the LORD?

6        "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
          to loose the chains of injustice  
          and untie the cords of the yoke,  
          to set the oppressed free  
          and break every yoke?

7        Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
          and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
          when you see the naked, to clothe them,



and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

- 8        Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
             and your healing will quickly appear;  
             then your righteousness will go before you,  
             and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
- 9        Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
             you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

*Isaiah 58:3-9*

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

- " 'He will command his angels concerning you,  
             and they will lift you up in their hands,  
             so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

*Matthew 4:1-11*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. While fasting from food is the primary way of fasting, are there additional things from which it would be good for you to fast? Keep in mind that fasting from something does not communicate that the practice is illegitimate or entirely unhelpful, it is to seek a greater awareness and presence of God's work in your life.
2. How do you see the connection between fasting and prayer? How does fasting connect to the other practices discussed thus far?
3. Have you ever used fasting – or any other spiritual practice – as a way of getting attention or showing off? How can this manipulation of God and others prove toxic to your life with God? How can it impact your brothers and sisters in Christ?
4. What are some practical difficulties for you of fasting in a private way?
5. What are the benefits of not publicizing our intention to fast?
6. What do you need to do in order to grow in your understanding and practice of fasting?
7. How do you or could you combine the activities of work and prayer?
8. What truth lies at the heart of fasting and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
9. How do you see the practice of fasting modeled in the life of Jesus?
10. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Design and undertake a modest fast from food. Designate the period of time you wish to continue to the fast. Do not be too ambitious if this is your first time fasting, perhaps consider skipping lunch and dinner, one day. Observe the fast focusing on prayer and communion with the Lord as often as possible.
- After completing a fast reflect on the meaning and significance of the fast. What prompted your fast? What did you experience during the fast? What obstacles or spiritual struggle did you encounter before, during or even after the fast? How did you prayer or experience God's presence during the fast?
- One way of fasting is to abstain from a certain food, treat or habit over a given period of time. A common time this type of fasting is done is during Lent, when people give up sugar, or social media, or alcohol for a season. These forms of abstinence are so commonplace and socially acceptable that they need not be perceive as "fasting." Consider doing one or more of these things without explaining to others that you are "fasting." Consider carefully how can you still pursue communion with the Lord during this time of "fasting."
- Reflect in a journal or with a confidant, about your practice of the spiritual disciplines. Are you pretending in some way in your spiritual life in order to spiritually posture yourself before God and others? Or are you following the will and example of Christ?

## SABBATH

"The word *Sabbath* comes to us from the Hebrew *Shabbat*. The word literally means "to stop." The Sabbath is simply a day to stop: stop working, stop wanting, stop worrying, just *stop*...But Sabbath is more than just a day; it's a *way of being* in the world. It's a spirit of restfulness that comes from abiding from living in the Father's loving presence all week long...There is a discipline to the Sabbath that is really hard for a lot of us. It takes a lot of intentionality: it won't just happen to you. It takes planning and preparation. It takes self-control, the capacity to say no to a list of good things so you can say yes to the best. But Sabbath is the primary discipline, or practice, by which we cultivate the spirit of restfulness in our lives *as a whole*. The Sabbath is to a spirit of restfulness what a soccer practice is to a match or band practice is to a show. It's how we practice, how we prepare our minds and bodies for the moments that matter most."

John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

"Trying to sabbath brings almost everyone to the same realization: "I can't get it all done..." *This is the point!* Practicing sabbath *is supposed* to make us feel like we can't get it all done because that is the way reality is. We can't do it all. Sabbath protects us from acting out the lie that we can...Sabbath helps me see how small I am. When I don't see that, I'm always prone to misunderstand the reality of who is dependent on who. The believe that we sustain the world and God doesn't is at the core of our unrest...In the deep stillness of habitual sabbath, the truth of the world begins to sink in: you are not necessary. That's the beauty of grace...Sabbath is the essence of our salvation. We can rest because God has done all that needs to be done."

Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

*Ephesians 6:18-20*

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

He said to them, "When you pray, say:

" 'Father,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come.  
Give us each day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.  
And lead us not into temptation.' "

Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

*Luke 11:1-9*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Do you view sabbath more as a burdensome duty and obligation, or as a gracious opportunity? What can you do help yourself view sabbath as a gift of grace?
2. What drives your working on days that your job does not typically or technically consider workdays?
3. How might the needs for healthy sabbath shift for someone who worked at a desk all day versus someone who worked in physical labor all day? How could this inform your own practice of sabbath?
4. What do you need to change during the structure of the rest of your work, in order to take one day to sabbath? Be specific and thorough in thinking through the pattern of your six days of work in order to more fully take a day to rest in God's provision.
5. What truth lies at the heart of sabbath and how can you keep this truth before you as you practice this discipline?
6. How do you see the practice of sabbath modeled in the life of Jesus?
7. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Practice Sabbath:
  - Pick a twenty-four-hour period during which to sabbath. This period of should be flexible enough to fit the needs and demands of your family schedule, whatever that may be.
  - Recognize that many things will still need to happen (e.g., children and adults will still eat), so aim to eliminate three things that distract you from the Lord and/or from the people he has put around you. Additionally select three things that you want to intentionally pursue during your day of sabbath.
  - Discern a division of labor that respects the needs and abilities of those with whom you sabbath.
  - If necessary communicate your absence from work through an automated email reply so that you do not feel the need to check work email.
  - If necessary, work all or part of a sixth day of the week in order to fully sabbath on a seventh day of the week.
- Conduct a digital sabbath (this is similar to a media fast), by abstaining from the use of screens for a 24-hour period. For many the use of a screen is what ties you to the ceaselessness of work, or the restlessness of entertainment. Simply by eliminating digital technology for a 24 -our period many of us will be able to incorporate more intentional time with the Lord and with others.

## STUDY

"As I have marinated in the Scriptures, I have constantly heard the words of Paul to young Timothy ringing in my ears: "Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15)...Together these statements highlight the need for confidence in God to guide us in the straight path and the diligent demonstration of righteousness (an eminently covenantal concept) by the person on the journey. In his pastoral word to Timothy, Paul had in mind the journey toward truth.

Daniel Block, *Covenant*

"As we read on a daily basis, growing in our skill in Bible reading, the rhythm of a life lived deeply in god's Word will become as nurturing as our daily meals, as spiritually strengthening as daily exercise, and as emotionally satisfying as a good-morning kiss from a spouse. It takes discipline, but Bible reading can come to be a discipline of delight if we open our heart and lives to it."

George Guthrie, *Read the Bible for Life*



## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

*2 Timothy 2:14-19*

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

*Ezra 7:8-10*

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

*Acts 17:10-12*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. Share your personal experiences with Bible reading and/or Bible study. How has this discipline been viewed, taught and practiced within the churches you have been a part?
2. What are some of the obstacles to in depth reading and study of Scripture?
3. What is the importance of your use of Bible translations within your study of Scripture? What are the advantages and disadvantages of exclusively using one translation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of more traditional and literal translations versus more contemporary or dynamic translations?
4. What do you think
5. How do you or could you combine the activities of work and prayer?
6. How do you see the practice of prayer modeled in the life of Jesus?
7. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Interweave an experience of prayer with an experience of work or labor. Pray while running or riding a bike; pray while exercising or lifting weights.
- Pray the Lord's prayer, praying it phrase by phrase or even word by word.
- Pray specifically for someone you know needs the Lord to work in them. Pray wholeheartedly for wholeness to be restored to that person. Send her or him a card or note to say that you are praying for this.
- Choose a prayer place that is especially pleasant for you. Let your prayer bubble up from your natural joy in this place.

## PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"All kinds of spiritual disciplines, if they are void of the love of God, cannot remove a single sin from our lives. We should, without anxiety, accept that all our sins have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. From this perspective we are free to seek only to love Him with all our hearts. WE can take comfort in the fact that God seems to grant the greatest grace to the greatest sinners as signs of His great mercy."

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

"Make it your practice, before beginning any task, to look to God, even if it is just for a moment. Look to God while you are doing any activity and also after you have completed it. It takes much time and patience to perfect this practice, so do not. Be discouraged by failure. This habit is only developed with much difficulty. Yet when it is achieved, how great will be your joy...This practice of the Presence of God si somewhat difficult at the beginning. Yet if it is pursued faithfully, it works imperceptibly within the soul to produce marvelous results. IT draws down God's grace abundantly, and leads the soul gradually to the ever-present vision of God as loving and beloved. It is the most spiritual, the most real, the most free, and most life-giving form of prayer."

Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

## PASSAGES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL REFLECTION

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means "God with us").

*Matthew 1:22-23*

Because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

*Hebrews 13:5-6*

One thing I ask from the LORD,  
this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD  
and to seek him in his temple.  
For in the day of trouble  
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;  
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent  
and set me high upon a rock.

*Psalms 27:4-5*

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

*Colossians 3:16*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

1. What benefits might come to you from consistently drawing your mind towards the truth that God is with you?
2. What struggles or frustrations do you anticipate experiencing as you undertake this practice?
3. How might “practicing the presence of God” impact your relationship with the people you spend the most time with?
4. How might a recognition of God’s constant presence with you impact the way you undertake your work both inside and outside the home?
5. How does this practice relate to and differ from some of the other practices we have explored in this guide?
6. How do you see this practice exemplified in the life of Jesus?
7. Are there other biblical figures or examples of this practice that might shape your experience of this discipline?

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

- Throughout a day, pray before you start any new task. If you at work pray brief prayers before each sales call, or when switching from responding to emails to entering a meeting. If at home, try and pray as you transition into different household tasks, or moments of interacting with a child. Keep prayers brief (a sentence or two at most) reminding yourself of God's presence with you and asking Him to be at work in your work, or the lives of the people with whom you work.
- Take time during a break or quiet moment to spend 5 minutes or more focusing your mind and attention on God's presence and work in you. Use a short passage from Scripture as a way of focusing your thoughts (John 15:5 is a short but powerful verse).
- Find a friend who has a similar daily routine or structure as you and commit to practice the presence of God individually for a week. Then at the end of that week, have a conversation about what the experience was like for you and how God used it.