



## Ideas for Renewal

- *Take a nap!* According to the Sleep Foundation, naps can restore alertness, enhance performance, and reduce mistakes and accidents. A study at NASA on sleepy military pilots and astronauts found that a 40-minute nap improved performance by 34% and alertness 100%. Napping also has psychological benefits, leading to relaxation and rejuvenation.
- *Play a game.* Grab a few friends and a game from our game table. Did you know that laughter is scientifically proven to improve health? Laughter enhances the intake of oxygen-rich air, increases endorphin release in the brain that makes us feel good, and decreases stress hormones, leading to relaxation!
- *Read a book.* Rebecca Stevenson's books are available for purchase and are wonderfully encouraging and delightful to read. An assortment of novels and encouraging spiritual books are also available to borrow from our internal library (please return before you leave!).
- *Journal.* Consider these prompts as you spend time alone with pen and paper. What was the state of your heart as you prepared for this time away and how has it shifted as you've been here? What images or words have stood out to you from Rebecca's talks? Name your hopes and longings to the Lord, notice how it feels to write them down and describe any fears that surface. What scriptures come to mind that speaks to your hopes or fears?
- *Go for a swim.* Take advantage of the indoor pool or relax in the hot tub with friends.

- *Explore Downtown Wilmington.* Being in new places heightens our senses and helps us see all of life through a fresh lens. We would suggest exploring up and down the Riverwalk. You could also venture up Market St for ice cream at Kilwins.
- *Grab a treat with friends.* Food and drink tend to bring about wonderful conversation. Check out The Workshop for a coffee and a pastry, or head to Tower 7 for some chips and guac!
- *Take a walk on the beach.* Consider using the time to practice one of the spiritual disciplines described below, or practice a walking meditation. As you walk, consider each of your senses. Close your eyes and notice all the smells. Look around and notice the light, the colors of the sky and water, all the specific items that fill your visual field. Open your mouth and inhale deeply. How does the salty air feel moving through you? Feel the temperature of the sand beneath your feet and the air on your skin, notice the places your feet make contact with the ground and how it shifts or moves. Maybe change the pace of your steps to match your breath, or repeat a quiet breath prayer, matching each word with a step. Notice the thoughts that enter your mind as you focus on the physical sensations. Consider setting them aside and revisiting them kindly after you've spent time simply being.
- *Try something new.* We've included descriptions of three spiritual disciplines adapted from Adele Calhoun's "Spiritual Disciplines Handbook." Spiritual disciplines are intentional practices that connect us to our desire for more of God:
  - *Visio Divina*
  - *Contemplative Prayer*
  - *Prayer of Recollection*

## Visio Divina

*When I consider your heavens  
the work of your fingers, the moon  
and the stars. (Psalm 8:3)*

*The heavens declare the glory of God  
The skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1)*

*The earth is the Lord's,  
And everything in it. (Psalm 24:1)*

“Creation speaks. It speaks elegantly. It ‘pours forth speech’ of God. God ambushes people on riverbanks, mountaintops, in wilderness wasteland, whirlwinds, burning bushes and rushing winds. The house of God stretches from the view out my window to the edge of the universe and beyond...

Lectio divina is a way we pray the Scripture. Visio divina, holy seeing, is a way to pray with the eyes. For centuries, the church has put icons, the cross, stained glass, mosaics, art and statues in churches as invitations to pray with the eyes....

In One Thousand Gifts, Ann Voskamp writes, ‘*All beauty is only reflection. And whether I am conscious of it or not, any created thing of which I am amazed, it is the glimpse of his face to which I bow down. Looking is the love. Looking is the evidence of the believing.*’ Visio divina is a way to behold created beauty and lead us to prayer. “

### **PRACTICING VISIO DIVINA**

1. Let your inside noise quiet, and put yourself in God’s presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer.
2. Gaze at the image or scene of natural beauty with openness, and seek to see with God’s eyes.
3. Notice what stirs within you. What responses, memories and feelings does the image evoke? What connection does the image make with your life? Take your time.
4. Respond to God about what you are seeing and sensing. What do you want to take with you and remember about this time of prayer. Let the image continue to remind you to seek God.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Where and when is it easiest for you to pray?
2. What stirs in you when you are in nature or viewing something beautiful?
3. What does it mean to you to have a creator who is humble enough to come to you through the creations of human hands?

## **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

1. Choose a work of art and follow the steps for Visio Divina. Share your experiences with a friend.
2. Open your heart to noticing how God speaks through nature. If a sunset, a view, a shaft of light grabs your attention, stop. Let that image “pour out speech.” Then pour out your speech to God about the stirrings that come up within you.
3. Visit a beautiful building with the express purpose of meeting God there. Don’t force anything to happen. Be attentive. Your intention to meet God is what matters most. Trust that God will speak in due course.
4. Visio divina can also be practiced as people gather to create something beautiful together- collages, art work, photography, banners, etc. Allow the process to draw you into prayer.

*Adapted from Adele Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Revised and Expanded (2015), page 47-48.*

## Contemplative Prayer

“We often associate prayer with the words we say. Contemplative prayer is a way of being with God that does not depend on giving the Holy One information about what we would like done in the world. Just as friends can enjoy one another without conversing, contemplative prayer is a way of being with God without wordiness. In contemplative prayer we rest and wait. Keeping our hearts alert and awake to the presence of God and his Word, we listen.... In contemplative prayer we rest in God, depending on him to initiate communion and communication. We don't ask for things, we simply open ourselves to the Trinity, trusting we will be received into restful arms. It can be helpful to use imagination to put yourself in a receptive frame of mind. Use a scriptural image. Imagine that you are a weaned child sitting on your mother's lap. Lean your head against her and rest. Or imagine that the good Shepherd has led you beside the still waters. Lie down and rest there with God....

Life makes it evident that what we contemplate shapes us. Saints down through the ages have trusted that contemplating the truth, beauty and goodness of the Trinity could ultimately shape and change their souls.... Contemplative prayer need not be a mystical experience; it is far more likely to be a restful experience of Christ in me. “

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is your prayer mostly a one-side monologue with God? Do your prayers tend to dictate to God what you would like to see happen? Are your prayers a response to God's initiative in your life? What does this tell you about your understanding of prayer?
2. What does it mean to remain in Christ? (John 15:4)? How would you describe the “mystery” of “Christ in you” that Paul speaks of in Colossians 1:27?
3. Do you feel that being in the presence of God is not the same thing as prayer? Does it seem like wasting time? What does God think of you wasting time with him?

### SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. Settle into a time of quietness with God (if it is hard to sit still in God's presence, go for a walk). Say to God, “Here I am. I am with you.” Be with God. Welcome him with open arms. Be in the moment without controlling or influencing it. Give God the gift of your love and presence. Do not strive. There is nothing to achieve. Be with God in loving attentiveness. Leave his presence gently when you sense you must go.

2. Light a candle and become quiet before the creator of light. Allow the candlelight to center your heart in the Light of the world. Offer yourself and all your darkness to Jesus. Remain in his light. Be comforted; all the darkness in the world cannot put out the light one match. How much greater is the Light in you.
3. Sacred word. Choose a prayer word as the symbol of your desire to let Jesus' action and presence form you. The word could reflect a deep desire of your heart (e.g., love, grace, peace), or the word might be a name or title of God (e.g., Jesus, great Shepherd, Counselor, Healer of my soul, Defender). Become still and offer yourself and your love to God. Let this word or phrase draw you into the presence of Christ. When you are distracted, return gently to your word and to the Lord. At the end of the prayer, remain still for several minutes. Throughout your day, return to your word and remind the Lord of your love for him.

*Adapted from Adele Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Revised and Expanded (2015). Page 240-241.*

## Prayer of Recollection

“The Psalmist recollected his soul with this prayer, *Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you* (Psalm 116:7). A recollected soul is the opposite of a distracted, fragmented soul. It is a soul collected and at rest in God. Because it is natural for the mind to make random associations and wander off in a million directions, we need a prayer that recalls our soul to its center in God. The prayer of recollection reveals where our distracted hearts are going—where they are sidetracked by books on the desk, the sound of the radio in the next room and the new color scheme for the kitchen. Jesus said, ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Matthew 6:21). Distractions reveal our attachments. Attachments reveal what in our heart needs recollecting back to God once again.

The flood of distracting thoughts in prayer can be received as a gift... When you want to recollect your soul and end up rewriting the agenda for the next meeting in your head or when you begin praying for a colleague and end up imagining where you want to go on vacation, don't push these thoughts aside. Notice them. You cannot recollect what you don't know to be scattered. You cannot abandon what you don't see. The way to a heart at rest in God comes through confessing and abandoning our limited, preoccupied heart...

In the prayer of recollection we pay attention to our wandering thoughts and attachments so that we can be transformed. We open ourselves to seeing how secondary things have become idols of our heart—how our agendas, possessions, appearances and comforts matter more than keeping God first in our lives. The attachment to secondary things acts like a cataract on the eye, sapping out strength and spiritual energy and leaving us blind to what drives us. Throughout the ages, the faithful consistently proclaim, as Jesus did, that relinquishment of secondary things is the key to delight in God.

Transformation into Christlikeness requires detachment from whatever keeps us from returning to and resting in God, who is our treasure and our core. In the prayer of recollection we offer our distractible selves to Christ. We name our escape tactics and the fantasies designed to shield us from disappointment. Then we offer them to God who alone can save us from a divided heart and reunite us with the undivided heart of God.

Confessing our attachments before the Holy One, we return to our true root identity in God. We abandon the false self to embrace the true one. Remember, the self caught up in worry, power plays and image management is not the true self; it's a self that creates its identity through attachment to secondary things. But God has given you an identity. Receive it. Recollect your Christ-in-me identity. Over time, the prayer of recollection is

meant to shape your soul so you rest in the bosom of Christ, in the arms of God, in the love of the Spirit.”

### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. What makes it difficult for you to concentrate while praying?
2. How do you tend to react to distractions in prayer?
3. What do distractions in prayer reveal about your core identity and concerns?
4. When do you tend to be most secure in your identity?
5. What is it like to not have a clear role that defines how you are to interact with others?

### **SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

1. Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably with the Lord. Take some deep breaths, relaxing your body and quieting your mind. Offer yourself to God. Ask him to gather up the fragments of your scattered life and recollect your soul. Rest before him. When the distracting thoughts come up, write down one word that expresses your distraction. Let the thought go and return to your rest in God. After ten minutes, look at the words you have jotted down. What stands out to you? What anxieties do you see? Where is your identity centered? Confess that you are not called to control all that disrupts your life. Return these concerns to the Lord. Let him hold the concerns of your heart as you rest in him.
2. Intentionally come into the presence of God. Spend several minutes thanking Jesus that he is present with you. Then quietly settle into resting with and in him. When you become distracted, invite Jesus to look at the distraction with you. What does Jesus want to say to you about the distraction? Give the distraction to him again and settle into rest. Continue the process of handing distractions to Jesus as you settle more and more deeply into your restful identity in him.

*Adapted from Adele Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, Revised and Expanded (2015), pg. 282-283.*