

A detailed stained glass window with a diamond lattice pattern and various colorful panels. The text is overlaid on the window.

# *Practicing Presence*

*Chapel*

Sunday Mornings  
Wednesday Evenings



# Practicing Presence

*“The Invitation to solitude and silence... is an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives. It is an invitation to communication and communion with the One who is always present even when our awareness has been dulled by distraction.”*

*Ruth Haley Barton*

## **Welcome!**

You are about to enter into a quiet space. Though we have intentionally planned for this space to be quiet, that does not mean that you will hear or experience nothing. In fact, it is the quiet that we pray helps you hear more clearly – not hear yourself or someone else, but to hear the still small voice of the Lord.

Within these pages, you will find some of the practices that Christians through the centuries have used to tune their souls to hear and respond to the Lord. Practices could also be called spiritual disciplines or habits. ***Practices help us open our lives to the Holy Spirit’s work of transforming us into the image of Jesus for the sake of others.***

A good image to describe practices is a sailboat. A sailboat cannot move on its own. It is the wind that moves a boat. But the sails must be up in order to catch the wind. In the same way, we cannot transform ourselves. The Holy Spirit transforms us. Yet, we have a part to play: we hoist our sails. Practices are ways in which we “hoist our sails” and allow room for the Spirit to transform us. What the image of the sailboat does not capture is that as we engage with the Lord, we are not only moved, we are also changed and strengthened. As we hoist



Spiritual disciplines are means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. It means somewhere you're not occupied and you're certainly not preoccupied. It means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned on or counted on.

Henry Nouwen



our sails through practices and the Spirit moves us, new sails are formed so that we become a strong ship, able by the Lord's goodness to respond readily to His love and share His love with others.

The practices in this book are not ways in which we get the Lord to do our bidding, earn the Lord's favor, or in any way try to be in control of our own spiritual growth. Practices are offered to the Lord with no strings attached. We simply offer the practice to the Lord for the Lord to use as He will, to transform us through the power of the Spirit. This means, if you don't "feel" anything while you practice, that is okay, even normal, especially when it's new. No matter what we feel, we can trust that the Lord will be the one to do good work in and through us.

The practices in this booklet are only some of the practices you might engage in. They are particularly suited to a quiet space. In addition to these, there will be other practice ideas provided on a rotating basis. You may find these ideas on the table outside of this space.

*May God — Father, Son, and Spirit — be glorified!*

# Prayer Practices

## Praying Scripture

*“But what if prayer is more than simply self-expression? What if prayer is a kind of craft or exercise that shapes us? What if God uses prayer to “act back on us,” to form us? What if set liturgical prayers are an ancient tool that reframe our perspectives and desires so that we might learn to pray in ways that are beyond us? For most of church history, Christians understood prayer not primarily as a means of authentic self-expression, but as a learned way of approaching God. The earliest prayer book of the church was the Psalms, which have been prayed, memorized, and sung in every language and time throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity.”*

*Tish Harrison Warren*

Praying Scripture expands our vocabulary, forming us to love what God loves. It is a hedge that keeps us from using prayer to get God to do what we want, and instead gives God room to tell us what He wants. Praying Scripture is also a gift in the times in which we have no words – lost in grief, doubt, melancholy, confusion or whatever it may be that steals our ability to express ourselves or reveals that we do not truly know ourselves or what is best for us.

Here are some ways to pray Scripture:

- Use the Lord’s prayer. Pause after each phrase and let the phrase lead you into prayer. For example, after praying “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” spend time adoring God for who He is.
- Pray through the Psalms, one each evening or morning, in order, even if the Psalm doesn’t match your current mood.
- Other prayers: Ephesians 1:15-21, Philippians 1:3-6, 9; John 17

## ***The Examen\****

The Examen is prayerful reflection for discerning God's presence and work in the ordinary of our days. It was developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the 16th century and disciples of many traditions have found it a helpful way to become aware of and thankful for the Lord. It is often practiced in the evenings as a way to review the day and look ahead to the next. It can also be practiced with a larger period in mind: a week, month, or season.

**Step 1** — Become aware of the Lord's presence. Ask the Lord to help you see your days through His eyes.

**Step 2** — Review the last day/week/season with the Lord. For what moment(s) are you most grateful? When did you receive and give the most love? Talk to the Lord about what it was like for you to be in that moment. Share your thanksgiving and let it lead you into prayer.

**Step 3** — Continue to review your day/week/season with the Lord by considering the low points. For what moment(s) are you least grateful? When did you receive and give the least love? Try to attend to your thoughts and emotions without cleaning them up. Offer your thoughts and emotions to the Lord and let it lead you into prayer.

**Step 4** — Pray about the day/week/season to come. Imagine the things you will be doing, the people you will be interacting with, and the decisions that may need to be made. Ask the Lord to make you aware of His presence through the day, and to give you His wisdom and strength especially in those places which did not go well today.

**Step 5** — Rest in God's grace.

\* **App Option:** Fuller Theological Seminary has a free Examen App that helps engage our visual and auditory senses as we go through the steps of this prayer. The full video is 18 minutes long. It is available in the App store, or you may find it here: <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/prayer-of-examen/> If you use this option while in the quiet space, please use your headphones.

## ***Breath Prayer***

The breath prayer is a practice that allows us to bring our desire to God in a simple way that connects with our very breath. It is an ancient Christian practice that has been used at least since the 6th century. It's also known as the "Jesus Prayer," named after the most well known breath prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God; have mercy on me a sinner," sometimes shortened to "Jesus, have mercy." Breath prayers are short and simple, only 6-8 syllables so that you can verbally or silently pray it while you inhale and exhale. Breath prayers are an excellent way to meditate, quiet your heart, and know that God is God. They can be used anywhere and everywhere, even as you work and play.

Form your own breath prayer. Following these suggested steps may help:

1. Ask God to direct your prayer.
2. Choose a name and/or characteristic of God that tugs at your heart and mind. This will be the first part of your breath prayer, prayed when you inhale.
3. Reflect on what you, or another person, may need. This will be the second part of your breath prayer, prayed when you exhale.
4. Breath prayers can adjust depending on what you need and how God leads.

Examples of breath prayers:

- Holy God... give us/me your peace.
- Lord Jesus... be near.
- You are my shepherd... I shall not want.
- Abba... I belong to you.
- Pursuing God... bring home my lost daughter.

## ***Prayer Postures***

We are creatures with bodies and our bodies matter. Our bodies can be a part of our prayer, embodying our prayers and shaking us out of our routines, which may help us better hear the Lord. Try out one or more of these prayer postures:

- ***Bowing*** is a posture of giving honor and respect. (Psalm 95:6)
- ***Kneeling*** is a posture of humility and dependence. (Acts 7:60; Luke 22:41)
- ***Standing*** is a posture of respect. The early church often stood during corporate prayers.
- ***Lying prostrate*** (*flat on ground*) is a posture taken when overwhelmed by need, thanksgiving, or awe. (Numbers 20:6; Revelation 7:11)
- ***Hands raised*** is a posture of adoration. (Psalm 134)
- ***Palms up/down*** — Holding open hands, palms up, during prayer is a posture of receiving. Placing your palms down is a posture of letting go. Try opening your hands while listening to God in silence, and then turning your hands over when praying for needs, releasing them to God's sovereignty.



# Scripture Practices

## ***Meditating on Scripture***

Another word for meditation is rumination. It is a helpful synonym as it relates to a cow chewing its cud. Cows digest their food in stages by chewing, swallowing, regurgitating, and chewing again. This is rumination. In meditation we ruminate on the Word of God, taking it in, working it over, allowing it to settle, then working it over again to get all the nutrition for our souls out of it that we can.

Adele Calhoun, in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, writes this about meditation: *“Meditation runs counter to our busy culture, where speed reading, first impressions and skimming are as deep as we go. In meditation we gaze at something or someone long and longingly. We seek the treasure and truth of what we see. Just as moving a prism reveals different bands of color, meditation allows God to shine his truth and light into our hearts.”*

A Process for Meditating on Scripture:

- Start by reminding yourself that meditation is meant to help you love God with your whole being.
- Read the passage that you will meditate on several times. Pay attention to the flow, general ideas, and the main point of the text.
- Think about the important words in the text. What do they mean in this setting? What mood or tone do you hear from the verses?
- Invite the Holy Spirit to come and illuminate (shed light, light up) the Word in your mind and soul. Without the help of God it is impossible for us to understand the deep meaning of Scripture.
- In a relaxed manner, examine the passage in your mind. What associations with other passages in the Bible come to mind? What have you heard said about this text before? Do connections come to your mind with events or circumstances in your life, past or present?
- Now consider where the passage settles in your soul and emotions. What response is it evoking within you?
- Thank God for speaking with you through His Word.

## Lectio Divina

Lectio divina means “divine reading.” It exists to further companionship with the Lord. It invites us into God’s presence to listen for His particular, loving word to each of us at this moment in time. It is a way of praying with the heart, allowing the Spirit room to transform us through the Word of God. There are

various ways to approach lectio divina. This particular method includes five movements: silence, reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating.



When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories, but our stories in God’s. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.

Eugene Peterson



**Silence.** Silence is preparation for spiritual reading. It’s a way to shift from control to receptivity, from information to formation, from observation to obedience. Come into God’s presence: slow down, relax, and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to God.

**Read.** Read a Scripture passage slowly, lingering over the words so that they resonate in your heart. When a word or phrase catches your attention, stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the word. Try not to analyze, and instead listen and wait.

**Meditate.** Read the Scripture a second time. Savor the words. Listen for any invitation that

God is extending to you in His word. Reflect on the importance of the words that resonate with you.

**Respond in prayer.** Read the Scripture a third time. Now is the moment to enter into a personal conversation with God. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. We share with God the feelings the text has aroused in us: feelings such as love, joy, sorrow, anger, repentance, desire, need, conviction, or consecration. We pour out our hearts to God in complete openness and honesty, especially as the text has probed aspects of our being and doing in the midst of various issues and relationships.

***Contemplate.*** Rest and wait in the presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God. Before you end your time, ask the Lord for a reminder that can help you dwell on or live out this word through the day.

### ***Engaging your senses***

The imaginative method of engaging in Scripture uses our feeling and sensing functions. It is a particularly helpful way to read the narrative passages of Scripture (such as the Gospels). We enter the passage as if we are there, experiencing the moment for ourselves. As you read a passage, imagine yourself to be a part of the scene, a participant in the story. Imaging could include:

Letting your imagination loose and using all of your senses:

- What would you be seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling?
- Consider where or who you would be as the story unfolds. With whom do you identify?
- Consider being in Jesus' presence in this narrative. What do you feel as you watch Him? What is the look in His eyes as He turns to you? Does He have something He wants to say to you?

Once you have recreated the scene and placed yourself there, begin to examine your thoughts and feelings that have arisen.

- Is there something in the story with which you identify?
- Is there something that resonates or that brings you comfort?
- Is there something that creates dissonance or that makes you uncomfortable?

If something sticks out to you during your meditation, share it with God. Sit for a few moments in peace, companioning with God as His word settles in. In the stillness, listen to see if the Lord has something to say to you. Close your time with a prayer of thanksgiving.



300 North Cherry Street  
Winston-Salem, NC 27101