

# TPC Catalogue of Shared Practices

## Practices of the Word

### Time of Meditation

#### **What?**

Several days this week, meditate on a passage of Scripture for 10-15 minutes.

#### **Why?**

Many ideas, stories, people, and experiences capture our minds and imaginations, promising us joy, fulfillment, identity, and more. Because these promises are not founded on infinite love and faithfulness and truth, they will inevitably disappoint us and leave us lost and confused. But God is, in fact, infinitely loving and faithful, and his promises are “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19). By filling our minds with his Word, his promises seep into our imaginations and hearts so that we long for and are satisfied in the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

#### **How?**

Most will find it helpful first to set a specific time to spend in meditation. Then, pick one passage to meditate on throughout the week, or pick a number of passages. If you don't know where to begin, take a look at the TPC [Daily Reading](#) plan. If you read all the selections on a given day, set apart some time to meditate on a smaller passage within that day's readings. The idea here is not simply to read but to chew on and digest and be filled with God's Word.

(Notice the difference between Eastern meditation and biblical meditation. In Eastern meditation, one attempts to center oneself or empty one's mind. In biblical meditation, one fills one's mind with the truth of Scripture.)

If you've never practiced biblical meditation, here are some tips:

1. Read the passage slowly.
2. As you read, pay attention to the various aspects of the passage. What is God doing? What role does his Anointed One play? How are the effects of sin being undone? What does God reveal about a restored universe? How do his people respond? You may want to reread the passage multiple times.
3. Allow your imagination to swim in the passage or even a few verses. Make its descriptions and images come to life. Really place yourself into the passage as far as possible.

4. Take account of the ways in which the passage interacts with you. Does it challenge your thinking, cause you to worship or wonder, convict you of sin? Process these things, and turn your thoughts and feelings into prayer.

If you find that your mind wanders, do not worry about it. Simply acknowledge that your mind has wandered then turn back to filling your mind with truth.

## Memorize Scripture

### *What?*

Memorize one verse or short passage of Scripture this week.

### *Why?*

When the devil sought to tempt Jesus, the Son of God responded with the Word of God: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4, quoting Deut 8:3). He resisted the lure of sin by storing the Word in his heart (Ps 119:11) and relishing it as sweeter than honey (Ps 19:10). By following this pattern of Scripture memorization, we discover the will of God more fully, discern truth from error more easily, disciple others more effectively, and commune with the Father more deeply. In short, we grow more into the image of Christ — full of his life, love, peace, and righteousness.

### *How?*

Memorization techniques abound, and a simple internet search could track down some effective methods (like [this one for long-term memorization](#)). But to store the Word in your heart is a deeper process that ought to integrate as much of you — mind, spirit, and body — as possible. With that in mind, here are some helpful tips:

- 1. Understand the text.** Look at the full context in which the passage falls and take time to consider what the author intended to communicate. Do a little study.
- 2. Meditate on the text.** Allow the Word to fill your imagination, considering all the implications of the text and how it affects you directly. Wonder at the majesty of God revealed in the text, express gratitude for his goodness, and join your story to his Story.
- 3. Pray the text.** Turn those verses into a prayer of praise, thanksgiving, confession, or petition.
- 4. Embody the text.** This could mean two things. Embodying the text could refer to living it out, practicing what it says. And you should certainly do that. But also engage the text with your body: Speak it out loud, listen to it, and write it. To challenge your creativity, draw it or turn it into a song.

Combine these with traditional memorization techniques, which usually involve a fair amount of repetition and quizzing yourself, and ask the Holy Spirit to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## **Scripture Before Screens**

### ***What?***

Before opening a phone or computer, open and read the Word of God.

### ***Why?***

Refusing to check the phone until after reading a passage of Scripture is a way of replacing the question "What do I need to do today?" with a better one, "Who am I and who am I becoming?" Daily immersion in the Scriptures resists the anxiety of emails, the outrage of news, and the envy of social media. Instead, it exposes our sin, reveals our Savior, and forms us daily in our true identity as children of the King, dearly loved.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### ***How?***

Consider following a daily Bible reading plan like TPC Reads, the plan created specifically for our church body ([www.theparkschurch.com/tpcreads](http://www.theparkschurch.com/tpcreads)). If you're new to this practice, begin by reading only the daily Psalm or just a chapter from the Old or New Testament reading. (If you are not receiving the daily email with that day's readings with reflection questions, email [Michael](mailto:Michael) and ask to be added to the mailing list.)

Before you read, pray that the Holy Spirit would allow you to hear what God has said and is still saying and to receive his Word as your final authority.

As you read, you can ask yourself these three questions as a starting point: (1) What does this reveal about God? (2) How does this expose my need for his salvation in Jesus Christ? (3) How should I respond?

Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## **Journal Scripture**

### ***What?***

Journal a reflection on one passage of Scripture this week.

### ***Why?***

The history of God's people is littered with examples of people forgetting and failing to apply God's Word. Journaling cannot cure us of that by any means, but writing down our meditations on Scripture presses God's revelation more deeply into our hearts. In journaling, we are forced to be more attentive and to wrestle with what God is saying rather than gloss over the text. And we are forced to reckon with ourselves, identifying the ways in which the text is convicting us of sin, encouraging us to give praise and thanksgiving, or calling us to greater dependence on the Lord.

### ***How?***

There is no right or wrong way to journal, but the HEAR method (**H**ighlight, **E**xplain, **A**pply, **R**espond) is a helpful way of listening to the Word of God intently and responding faithfully. In the HEAR journaling method, we begin by praying that the Spirit would give us insight and by reading the passage carefully. We then create four sections in our journal and consider the following questions in each section. (The point is not to answer each question but to allow these questions to guide our reflection.)

### ***Highlight***

- What verse(s) stand out the most to you?
- Write out the verse including its reference.
- Give a title to that section of Scripture in your own words.

### ***Explain***

- What is the author's intended meaning in the context of the passage?
  - To whom was it written and why?
  - How does it fit with the verses before and after it?
- What does the passage reveal about God? About his people? About humanity?
- How does the passage relate to the overarching story of Scripture, centered on Jesus Christ?
- Do any other Scriptures come to mind that aid your understanding of this passage?

### ***Apply***

- What is God revealing to me, as someone saved by faith in Jesus?
- How does this passage deepen my understanding of and trust in God and his promises?
  - How does it cause me to worship, wonder, and give thanks?
  - What is it calling to remembrance about him that I often forget?
- How is it directing my desires, thoughts, and action?
  - What sins, false idols, or misguided desires does it expose that I need to confess?
  - What values of God's Kingdom is it calling me to exhibit?
  - Are there commands to obey or examples to follow?

### ***Respond***

- How will I respond to this passage?
- How will I engage my spheres of influence this week differently because of this passage?
- How will this passage affect my thought and prayer life?
- Write out your specific call to action or a specific prayer.

# Practices of Prayer

## Kneeling Prayer

### **What?**

Kneel three times a day — morning, noon, and night — to pray.

### **Why?**

Words shape the world. Even small, repeated words have power. Regular, carefully placed prayer is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation, growing our relationship with our Lord. By framing our day in the words of prayer, we submit our anxieties and desires to God and frame the day in love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### **How?**

When you first wake up, in the middle of the day, and before going to bed, kneel as an act of submission to God and offer a prayer. Pray a prayer, short or long, that frames that time of day. For example,

- Morning: Submit your day to the Lord and ask for his grace.
- Midday: Pray for enduring faithfulness that you might glorify him always.
- Evening: Thank the Lord for his provision and steadfast love.

Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## Prayer of Confession

### **What?**

During your time of daily prayer, confess (1) that you are a sinner, naming specific sins, and (2) that Jesus is your only Savior and Lord.

### **Why?**

When God confronted Adam after his sin, Adam's first response was to blame Eve. Eve in turn blamed the serpent. And ever since, humanity has attempted to hide from the reality that we are sinners; our nature is corrupt and broken. Telling ourselves that we are good deep down does not make it so but rather prevents true healing from taking place. In confessing our sin, we are in a sense exposing our wounds. But in confession Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we acknowledge that the Great Physician is healing those wounds by his death and resurrection.

### **How?**

Although you can offer a prayer of confession any time of day, a short prayer in the morning helps frame your entire day in the truth and love of God. It allows you to set down your pride and self-importance and receive the sanctifying grace of Christ.

Because it goes against our nature to admit our wrongs, praying a pre-written prayer can assist you in identifying the many ways in which we sin (and thus the great extent to which Christ saves us). Psalm 51 is a great place to begin. You can also view prayers [here](#) and [here](#).

You might also consider journaling your prayer. This also allows you to really see your sin, acknowledge it, and release it to the saving work of God.

## **Prayer of Peace**

### ***What?***

Every day, pray that the peace of Christ would bring rest to your soul and stillness to our chaotic world.

### ***Why?***

God created the world in shalom — peace, wholeness, order, flourishing. But our sin has broken that peace, sowing chaos and discord in every person's heart and across every culture. Although we long for God's original state of affairs, only Jesus, through his perfect sacrifice for sin, establishes a lasting peace that endures all trials (John 16:33), breaks down all hostility (Ephesians 2:13-17), and surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

### ***How?***

As it is for most spiritual disciplines, it helps to choose a consistent time and place each day. This may be a time of prayer alone or with those in your household, spoken or written, your own words or the [words of another](#).

As you pray for God's peace personally, name specific things that cause disharmony in your life: sins, anxieties, ailments, doubts, etc. Ask the Spirit of God to fill you with his presence on a continual basis that you might radiate the peace of Christ.

As you pray for God's peace to bring healing to our world, name specific sources of brokenness and discord. Pray for the lost, the hurting, the imprisoned, and the poor. Pray for our elected leaders, appointed officials, and all civil servants. Pray against tribalism and hatred but for reconciliation and unity. Pray against injustice, violence, and lies. Pray for wisdom in dealing with the pandemic. Ask the Holy Spirit to open spiritual eyes and renew sinful hearts that the grace and love of Jesus might flood the world.

To deepen your longing for the peace of Christ, consider reading or praying through these passages of Scripture:

- Psalm 39:7-13; 42-43; 72:1-14; 85
- Ezekiel 34:25-31; 37:24-28
- John 14:25-31; 16:33
- Romans 5:1-11
- Ephesians 2:13-17
- Philippians 4:4-9
- Colossians 1:19-22
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

## Prayer of Adoration

### **What?**

During your time of daily prayer, offer a prayer of adoration, worshipping and praising God for who he is.

### **Why?**

Every deep relationship requires that we acknowledge the worth of the other person whose fellowship we enjoy. Offering compliments and praise reminds us of their value and completes our enjoyment of their fellowship. This is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray as he did. Purposefully acknowledging the infinite worth of God — “hallowed be your name” — steers our hearts away from adoring ourselves and other creatures, reveals that our heart has truly grasped the magnificence of “our Father in heaven,” and allows us to rest more deeply in fellowship with him.

### **How?**

First, we should observe that in adoration, we acknowledge the marvelous attributes and works of God. These are words of praise focused solely on honoring God apart from any particular circumstances. To adore God is simply to express what is true about him. This in turn functions as a sort of gateway to other forms of prayer like confession, thanksgiving, and petition. For example,

- Adoration: God, you are great, and there is no one like you.
- Confession: Lord, I fail to recognize your greatness and constantly try to build up my own reputation and success.
- Thanksgiving: I thank you that there is none greater than you and that I can have confidence in your care of me.
- Petition: My troubles are overwhelming, but I know that you are greater, Lord. So please rescue me from my suffering.

Second, if adoration is praising God for who he is, or what is true about him, we can pick any of his attributes and works and express these back to him. (Not that he needs our validation, but this completes our enjoyment of him just as it complete one’s enjoyment of one’s partner to express to them, “You are beautiful” or “You are handsome.”) So explore in prayer God’s holiness, self-sufficiency, omnipotence, grace, love, justice, truthfulness, and more. Helpful resources include:

- [Praying the Attributes of God](#) by Rosemary Jensen (Follow the link to see a preview of seven chapters. This also demonstrates how each attribute is rooted in Scripture and leads to other forms of prayer.)
- [The Knowledge of the Holy](#) by A.W. Tozer (The link provides the full text of the book. Each chapter begins and ends with a prayer concerning an attribute of God.)
- [“Praying the Names and Attributes of God”](#) (This article lists thirty names of attributes of God with simple definitions and relevant Scripture.)

Third, besides the Word-made-flesh, there is no better teacher of prayer than the written Word to enlarge your vocabulary for prayer.

- As you read Scripture, ask yourself what that passage reveals about God, and turn this into praise.

- Take a look at specific prayers of adoration by God's faithful like Moses (Exodus 15:1-18), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), Isaiah (Isaiah 40:9-31), Mary (Luke 1:46-55), Paul (Ephesians 1:3-14), or the angels in heaven (Revelation 4:8, 11; 5:9-14).
- The Psalms, what some have called the Bible's prayerbook, contain innumerable prayers of worship throughout. Some that focus on adoration include Psalm 8, 18, 24, 29, 33, 34, 36, 46, 47, 65-68, 84, 89-100, 103-107, 111, 113-118, 121, 130, 135-136, 139, and 144-150. Make these your own prayers.

## Written Prayer

### *What?*

Each day, read a pre-written prayer or write a prayer of your own.

### *Why?*

The earliest Christians devoted themselves to consciously communing with God, trusting that by going before him in prayer, his kingdom of love and peace and joy would take root in their hearts and spread out into all the world. The Lord answered their prayers mightily. And he would answer our prayers today as well, but we frequently find our prayer life stunted by distracted minds and a weak, thin vocabulary of prayer. Written prayers, whether composed by others or ourselves, can counter these impediments to our walk with God and can deepen and enlarge our life of prayer.

### *How?*

The desire to grow in prayer is good, but it is an empty desire if we do not create some plan of action. Start by answering these simple questions:

- When will I pray each day?
- Where will I pray each day?
- Will I write down my prayer, or will I adopt the written prayer of another in my daily time of prayer?

**Writing a Prayer.** Writing down a prayer especially helps to curb the tendency we all have to let our minds wander off while praying. We are forced to say something specific to God rather than allow some vague ideas and prayers to float around in our minds without ever really getting at anything. One's pen or pencil can capture those prayers and set them before the Lord. Your written prayer could take many forms or cover various topics.

- Simply jot down whatever prayer comes to mind in the moment.
- Write a prayer in response to your Scripture reading.
- Focus on one particular kind of prayer: adoration, confession, petition, thanksgiving, or intercession. (See [Matthew Henry's](#) helpful breakdown.)
- Center your prayers around the needs of those in your sphere of influence.
- Pray for the church and all who are called to witness to Christ (which is all of us!).
- Craft a poem of praise; create something beautiful for God.

We could create an endless list of topics. The idea is that you might find it helpful to pick one topic or idea and construct your prayer around that.



**Reading a Written Prayer.** Like Jesus' original disciples, we often don't even know what to pray (Luke 11:1). We can enlarge our vocabulary of prayer, however, by taking up the prayer that another believer has recorded for the benefit of the faithful. We can read these prayers as they are written, using our imagination to step into the thoughts and feelings of the original author and make the prayer our own. Or we can use these prayers as a template, summarizing and elaborating the writer's words with our own.

The first place one might start, of course, is the Bible. Besides the Psalms, which function like the Bible's prayerbook, God led many of his prophets and apostles to write down their prayers. One attempt at cataloging all these prayers may be found [here](#).

We may also learn from the saints of old who have demonstrated faithfulness or the liturgies of various churches across time, space, and tradition. Some of these include:

- [Augustine of Hippo](#)
- John Calvin ("[Several Godly Prayers](#)" and [prayers from his commentary on Hosea](#))
- [John Wesley](#)
- [Charles Spurgeon](#)
- [Thomas a Kempis](#)
- [A Collection of Prayers](#) (This is perhaps the most expansive collection of Christian prayers online.)
- [Prayers of the Early Church](#)
- [Book of Common Prayer](#)
- [The Valley of Vision](#)
- [Every Moment Holy](#)

## **Prayer of Intercession**

### ***What?***

Pray for the specific needs of others each day.

### ***Why?***

God is a perfect Father who loves to give good gifts to his children. He actually encourages them to rely fully on him, to ask, seek, and knock at his door (Matt 7:7-11), promising that when they ask according to his will, he hears and acts (1 John 5:14-15). God affects real change in the world through prayer. When we pair this truth with Jesus' concern for sinners and sufferers, we begin to understand our need for intercessory prayer, prayer that lifts up the needs of others. When we do pray for others, we not only more closely align our hearts and wills with God's, we love our neighbors well.

### ***How?***

Christians in our culture are generally pretty bad about not following through on prayer for others. We have all been on the giving and receiving end of a "I'll be praying for you" that never resulted in prayer. How can we remedy that?

**Countering cynicism, doubt, disbelief.** Sometimes we do not engage in intercessory prayer because we have prayed for particular circumstances before, and what we hoped would

happen did not come to pass. There are plenty of [good, theologically sound reasons](#) why that might have been the case (also [here](#)), but those reasons don't necessarily take away the sting of disappointment in the moment or the bite of cynicism that follows. Remembering the past faithfulness of God, what we need most is the prayer of the father who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus on our lips: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

**Countering our limited understanding of needs.** In an insightful article entitled "[Pray Beyond the Sick List](#)," David Powlison exposes that most of us have a limited understanding of what we ought to be praying for. We regularly offer up what he calls *circumstantial prayers*, prayers that God would change circumstances. But the Bible includes very many more *wisdom prayers*, prayers that seek the Lord's sanctifying grace, and *kingdom prayers*, high-level prayers that "ask God to *change everything by revealing Himself* more fully on the stage of real life" (emphasis original). Because we tend to focus on one to the exclusion of others, our intercessory prayers are limited and imbalanced. Our prayers for others would increase and deepen, perhaps, if we expanded the focus of our prayers, recognizing that our greatest need is essentially spiritual — to know and be known by God.

**Countering our limited understanding of particular needs.** Besides understanding needs generally, many of us don't truly know the particular needs (circumstantial or spiritual) of those around us. We must pray for intentional relationships of substance and eyes to see true needs. In doing so, we might find, for instance, that a friend not only needs a new job but lessened anxiety and deeper trust in the Lord's provision.

**Countering forgetfulness and distractedness.** The best tips that help us to remember our prayers for others involve writing something down — journaling our prayers, making a running prayer list, creating prayer note cards for specific people or certain needs, etc. It might also help to schedule a consistent time to pray and incorporate intercessory prayer as a regular part of that prayer time.

**Countering lack of know-how.** Still, after all this, we may feel like we simply do not know what or how to pray. We can look to some models of prayer for assistance. That may come by praying with others, or by praying written prayers. For the latter, [Matthew Henry's prayers of intercession](#) based on Scripture is a great place to start.

## Pray for the Lost

### **What?**

Every day pray that unbelievers in your immediate sphere of influence, your community, and around the world would come to saving faith in Christ.

### **Why?**

We were all subject to sin, floundering in chaos, destruction, and darkness. But God, by sheer grace, "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6) so that we might have new life in him. So why would we — or how could we — hide the light of the gospel and keep it to ourselves? In praying for the lost, we are beginning to allow that light to shine and trusting that God really does desire that all

should be saved (1 Tim 2:4), that he really does pursue sinners, and that he can soften even the hardest of hearts.

### ***How?***

The motivation to pray for unbelievers ought to arise out of gratitude for what God in Christ has done for us. We do well, then, to meditate on his saving work in our own life first — recounting, as the Apostle Paul sometimes did (see Acts 22:1-21, Acts 26:1-18; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:1-11), our past bondage to sin and current freedom in Christ. We remember that we did nothing to contribute to our salvation but that God drew us to himself because of his abundant love. This places us in the perfect position to request that he do the same for others.

But how exactly should we frame our prayers? What should we pray for? Scripture guides us on that point, and these resources draw out a number of biblical principles to shape our prayers:

- [“18 Prayers to Pray for Unbelievers”](#)
- [“How Can I Pray for Non-Believers”](#)
- [“4 Prayers to Pray for the Lost”](#)

# Practices of Resistance

## **Sabbath**

### ***What?***

One day this week, rest from your normal activities and engage in a refreshing or restorative activity.

### ***Why?***

Our constant doing and connecting trains us to believe that the world needs us to function. The weekly practice of Sabbath, however, teaches us that God sustains the world and that we don't. To make a countercultural embrace of our limitations, we stop our usual work for one day of rest. Sabbath is a gospel practice because it reminds us that the world doesn't hang on what we can accomplish, but rather on what God has accomplished for us.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### ***How?***

Think about what your average day consists of — checking emails, making phone calls, cleaning the house, running errands, etc. For one twenty-four-hour period, refrain from these activities. Consciously step away from the noise and bustle of daily life.

Resting does not necessarily entail refraining from all activity. (Remember that Jesus healed on the Sabbath!) Plan to do something refreshing. That will look different for every person and family and might include arranging an extended period in the Word or in prayer, spending time with friends, grabbing a good book, or heading to the park.

Some Christian leaders have recognized that, since we have a body and a mind, our Sabbath rest ought to refresh that part of us that lies stagnant throughout the week. That is, if you tend to work with your hands, something restful or restorative will engage the mind, and if your work involves a lot of brain power, consider a more physical activity.

## **Fast**

### ***What?***

Abstain from food for a day or more. When you would normally eat, meditate on the Word or pray instead.

### ***Why?***

We constantly seek to fill our emptiness by consuming food and other comforts. We ignore the state of our soul and our neighbor's need by medicating with food and drink. Regular fasting turns us from our tendency to consume. In our hunger, it exposes who we really are, helps us sympathize with those who often go without, and opens us to feast on the Word of God, Jesus Christ, the nourishing bread and water of our souls.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### ***How?***

Decide how long you will fast, whether that will be one to two meals or one or more days. Prior to fasting, be sure to consider any personal health risks (e.g., if you are diabetic, pregnant or nursing, etc.) and consult a doctor if necessary. Make sure to stay hydrated. It is best to ease into and out of a fast: Reduce your meal size prior to fasting, and do not engorge yourself when breaking the fast.

Plan what you will do rather than eating, such as praying or reading Scripture. This is what makes the practice most spiritually edifying. Also, plan on how the lack of food will likely affect you both physically and emotionally and prepare to counter these. For example, you might be tired and irritable. If you expect this, pray that the Lord would give you strength and a calm demeanor.

## **Time of Silence**

### ***What?***

Spend 15-30 minutes each day in silent reflection away from distractions.

### ***Why?***

We live in a loud age. White noise envelopes us from the house to the car to work to the store and everywhere in between. All of the noise demands our attention, distracting us from the inner workings of our hearts and minds and, more importantly, from the voice of God, who often speaks with “the sound of a low whisper (1 Kings 19:12). Intentional moments of silence allow us the opportunity to hone in on that voice, to pay special attention to his words rather than the competing calls for our hearts.

### ***How?***

Decide on an appropriate time of day. Let any necessary individuals know that you will be unavailable for a short time. Turn off or silence phones, computers, TVs, music players, etc. You might find it helpful to find a place of solitude, whether in your home, in a closed office, or at a park.

In that time, silence your own voice, and ask the Spirit to speak. Or, meditate on a passage or verse of Scripture or on an attribute of God. When your mind begins to wander, do not be discouraged. Acknowledge that your attention has strayed and refocus on listening or meditating.

Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## **One Day Without Media**

### ***What?***

For one day, refrain from all non-essential applications, including social media, sports, news, and shopping.

### ***Why?***

Scrolling, on any digital platform, rewires us to crave connectivity, the urge to place ourselves in the middle of all that is going on. But our mind becomes a landfill of mess, and we lose ourselves to anxiety, envy, and distraction, drowning out the voice of the Lord. Abstaining from media, reminds us that the world does not revolve around us but that the Lord holds all things together. By disconnecting from the noise, we are better positioned to connect to God.

### ***How?***

Set reminders on your phone the night before and the morning of. If needed, go into your phone's settings and manually pause non-essential apps for the day. When you find yourself wanting to scroll, pray instead. Thank God that he governs the world by his own power, and ask that he align your heart with his.

Commit with another person to practice this discipline. Ask your partner to text you at the beginning of the day to remind you about your practice and a follow up text at the end.

## **Hour with Phone Off**

### ***What?***

Each day, completely turn off your phone for at least one hour.

### ***Why?***

We were made for presence with others. But so often our phones are the cause of our absence, pulling our mind into a different place than our physical location. To split our attention between two places is to be no place at all. Turning off our phone for an hour a day is a way to turn our gaze up to each other, whether that be children, coworkers, friends, or neighbors. By resisting the draw to absence and granting those around us our full presence, we are in a better position to demonstrate the love of God.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### ***How?***

Decide what time each day you will shut off your phone. Setting an alarm could be a helpful reminder. You might need to let a spouse or roommate know that they will be unable to reach you during that time, but ideally you will be using that time to be present with friends and family.

This practice is especially beneficial when practiced together with people in the same household or with close friends. Choosing to give each other your full attention without the distraction of phones can help grow these relationships.

## **Curate Media**

### ***What?***

Limit your intake of streaming videos (YouTube, Netflix, and the like) to five hours or less this week.

### **Why?**

Humans are created for stories, which root themselves deeply into our hearts. We slowly begin to view the world according to the stories we absorb. Resisting the constant stream of addictive media forces us to curate what we watch. Curating stories with an eye towards spiritual formation means that we seek stories that uphold beauty, that teach us to love justice, and that turn us to community.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

### **How?**

Decide first what days you will watch media. On the other days, choose a few activities you can do when you would normally sit in front of a screen. (Consider some activities you can do alone and some with others.) Alternatively, set aside only thirty minutes to an hour each day to watch a documentary, show, or video.

Before the week begins, do a little research and create a little catalogue of shows or movies that uphold beauty, teach us to love justice, or turn us to community. Then, during your media time, pick something from your catalogue. Resist the urge to scroll.

You might consider adding sports and news to this practice in addition to streaming videos if you find yourself constantly before these media sources.

Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## **No Phone While Waiting**

### **What?**

Refrain from pulling out your phone any time you are waiting this week. Instead, engage those around you or silently pray.

### **Why?**

We were created to live in loving relationships — with God and our fellow man. We find that our phones, however, often split our attention and distract us from truly engaging others in love. In this Advent season, in which we celebrate Christ's first coming and long for his return when his love will fully heal all things, let us practice the love he has already shown us (1 John 4:10, 19) by consciously setting our phones down as we wait. This resists the distracted, me-centered world we live in and prepares our hearts to receive our King.

### **How?**

For many of us, pulling out our phone has become habit, something we do without thinking. For that reason, we might need a visible reminder to set it aside, like changing the background on the lock screen or home screen to a picture of a stop sign, a note that reads "wait in His love," or something that reminds us to set our phones back down.

Use these moments of waiting to practice praying "without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17), and recite a breath prayer, a short prayer that one offers while taking slow breaths. For example,

- "Father, [inhale] fill me with your love [exhale]."

- “Jesus, [inhale] let me know the love of the cross [exhale].”
- “Holy Spirit, [inhale] comfort me with your love [exhale].”

Or, pray in your own words.

- Ask the Lord for the grace to know and experience his overwhelming love which he has revealed in Christ (Ephesians 3:14-10; Romans 5:6-11; 8:31-39).
- Pray also for the strength to return his love with your whole heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).
- Pray that the Spirit would give you eyes to see those in need around you and the ability to extend Christ's love to them (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 25:31-40).

If you have not prepared in advance how you are to pray in your times of waiting or prepared yourself to act on the Spirit's leading in demonstrating love to others, more than likely you'll just be more bored than you typically would be if you had distracted yourself with your phone. Be purposeful in the waiting, and invite the Holy Spirit to grow you in love.

## **Simplify Your Schedule**

### ***What?***

Reduce the number of meetings, activities, commitments, or outings that you participate in this week.

### ***Why?***

Busyness and clutter plague our culture, distracting our attention and confusing our desires. Pulled in a thousand directions and burdened by a million commitments, we have become a fragmented people with unclear purpose, shallow devotion, and countless anxieties. A practice of external simplicity resists this tendency in our culture and allows us, by the power of the Spirit, to train towards the kind of internal simplicity that characterized Jesus — that single-minded intention to glorify God with one's whole life.

### ***How?***

Plenty of blogs can teach you how to declutter your life. For advice on acknowledging your priorities, distinguishing what is essential from what is extra, and making necessary cuts in your schedule, you should do a Google search and see what you find. But as believers in Jesus Christ, our purpose in practicing simplicity runs deeper: We want to utilize external disciplines to cultivate our spiritual life so that at our core we look more and more like Jesus. That means supplementing the blogs' advice with spiritual insights. Prayer ought to accompany this practice in several important ways.

1. In prayer, we must acknowledge that we are finite creatures who cannot be at all places or do all things and that only the Lord is God. We must lay aside our culturally-imposed ideal of playing God.

2. In prayer, we must ask for the discernment to identify the areas in our life in which we have busied ourselves, whether in productive ways (meetings, activities, house care, etc.) or in unproductive ways (“scrolling,” binge watching, shopping, etc.).



3. In prayer, we must lay our anxieties about not doing and going at the Lord's feet and ask that he build our trust in him.

4. Finally, in prayer, we must ask for the focus to seek first the Kingdom of God. With fewer distractions, spend time away from the doing and going and simply *be* with God in silence and prayer and the Word. Ask him how you can glorify him more fully and make that the entire goal of your life.

## **Simplify Your Possessions**

### ***What?***

Purposefully choose some of your possessions to give away.

### ***Why?***

Busyness and clutter plague our culture, distracting our attention and confusing our desires. Taken by the lie that the quantity and quality of our possessions reveal our worth, we have become a fragmented people with unclear purpose, fragile identity, and countless anxieties. A practice of external simplicity resists this tendency in our culture and allows us, by the power of the Spirit, to train towards the kind of internal simplicity that characterized Jesus — that single-minded intention to glorify God with one's whole life.

### ***How?***

Plenty of blogs can teach you how to declutter your life. For advice on evaluating your possessions, distinguishing what is essential from what is extra, and making necessary cuts, you should do a Google search and see what you find. But as believers in Jesus Christ, our purpose in practicing simplicity runs deeper: We want to utilize external disciplines to cultivate our spiritual life so that at our core we look more and more like Jesus. That means supplementing the blogs' advice with spiritual insights.

To that end, prayer ought to accompany this practice in several important ways:

1. In prayer, we must confess that we are creatures, not the Creator, although we often pretend to be. We do not own or possess anything in the ultimate sense as he does but are, at most, stewards of his good gifts.

2. In prayer, we must ask for the discernment to identify that which we truly need from that we simply want. We take Proverbs 30:8-9 as our prayer: "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."

3. In prayer, we must lay aside our anxieties that come with a mentality of scarcity — the mentality that believes the world's resources are scarce and must be gobbled up and held onto at all costs. Instead, we pray for a mentality of abundance, trusting that the Lord is bountiful in his provision.

4. Finally, in prayer, we must seek first the Kingdom of God and allow the Kingdom to reorient the way we view our things.

As one practical guide, try giving away not just what you might consider to be “extra” but something that is valuable, meaningful, or necessary. This is one way you can train yourself to have an open hand with your possessions, realizing that you are a steward, not an owner.

## Practices of Engagement

### Gather with Others for Worship

#### **What?**

Gather with a small group of friends or family on Sunday to sing, listen to the sermon, and pray together.

#### **Why?**

Our culture already tends to turn spirituality into a private matter, and the unfortunate nature of the current pandemic only heightens that problem. But God saves not just individuals but a “people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9); he calls us into a worshipping fellowship.

Gathering to worship, responsibly and safely, fights our self-centered tendencies and binds us together on mission to glorify God with our whole lives.

#### **How?**

Reach out to a few friends or family members whose pandemic-related precautions you are comfortable with. Choose a suitable home among this small group where you can watch and participate in the TPC online service on Sunday.

### One Hour of Conversation

#### **What?**

Meet with a friend this week for at least an hour for an intentional conversation.

#### **Why?**

We were made for each other, and we can't become lovers of God and neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. In habitual, face-to-face conversation with each other, we learn to share our thoughts, feelings, joys and struggles and to listen to the thoughts, feelings, joys, and struggles of others. We know and become known and, in our vulnerability, are loved anyways. The Holy Spirit works through intentional conversations to grow us more fully into the image of God.

(The Common Rule, adapted)

#### **How?**

Invite a close friend who also aspires to love Jesus more to join you in this practice. Intentional conversations grow in intimacy and effectiveness over time, so consider meeting not just this week but the following weeks or every other week. Setting a consistent time and place will help.

If this is to be more than a time to hang out but to build a Proverbs 27:17 friendship (“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”), begin to ask deeper questions. Ask specific questions about one another's work life, civic life, home life, and spiritual life that could help you better understand your friend and also encourage or challenge them.

- **Work Life:** How can you better glorify God in your work? What are your relationships with your coworkers like?

- **Civic Life:** How can you be an engaged citizen in your city or county? What shapes your political leanings? Are those guided by Scripture?
- **Home and Relational Life:** What are your relationships like with those inside your home? What are they like with those outside?
- **Spiritual Life:** What has recently inspired you to love God more? What temptations, challenges, or distractions have gotten in the way?

## **One Act of Service**

### ***What?***

Commit to serving a person or group, preferably outside of your household, at least once this week.

### ***Why?***

Before Jesus gave his life, he, the Son of God, stooped to wash the dirty feet of his disciples. While our culture might occasionally celebrate some displays of service, by and large we encourage people to serve or please or express themselves, to fight to be on top, to join the “in” crowd. Life centers on our self in competition with every other self. By making concerted efforts to serve others regularly, we resist this self-centered way of living and learn to walk in the humble, feet-washing way of Jesus.

### ***How?***

Do not plan that your act of service should be recognized (that’s serving for selfish reasons) or that you should in some way be paid back (that’s serving to manipulate) or that it will necessarily make you feel good about yourself in the moment (again, selfish reasons). Do pray fervently that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to see a need, for whomever that might be, and meet that need, whatever that might look like.

Richard Foster recognizes at least nine different kinds of service (Celebration of Discipline, 134-140). Here are a few. Consider choosing one that goes beyond your general comfort level:

- Service of small things: Assisting someone in a seemingly simple manner; active helpfulness
- Service of reputation guarding: Serving another by not contributing to and shutting down gossip or slander
- Service of common courtesy: Showing someone’s value by treating them kindly and respectfully, especially those who are more often neglected
- Service of hospitality: Opening up your home and life to others
- Service of bearing another’s burden: Praying for and walking alongside another in distress; active empathy
- Service of sharing words of life: Encouraging and building up others; sharing the Word of Life

Commit with another person to practice this discipline and hold each other accountable.

## **Feast**

### ***What?***

Gather some close friends or family together for a feast to celebrate the goodness of God.

### ***Why?***

Nehemiah encouraged the people of Israel that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). Similarly, Paul charged the church at Philippi to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). They direct us to live with joy because, together as God’s redeemed people, we have the ability to delight in the fellowship of the most glorious, beautiful Being in the universe. But in a world of anxiety and insecurity, guilt and shame, licentiousness and legalism, we must purposefully practice the joy of the Lord in community with other believers. Holding a feast is one avenue towards cultivating that joy.

### ***How?***

First, we have to distinguish a feast from a party. For a party, the hosts often fret about pulling together all the preparations and entertaining their guests. And for some, partying simply means over indulging (usually with alcohol). A feast, on the other hand, is about cultivating an anxiety-free, safe, and hospitable environment in which some celebration, some thanksgiving, and some simple enjoyment can take place to the glory of God.

Second, Paul’s words in Philippians 4:4-8 can guide our feasting:

1. Be reasonable; don’t go crazy (v. 5).
2. Actively reduce stressors and anxiety inducers (v. 6a). Share the load with meal preparation, don’t worry about dieting, give the kids a little more freedom in what they eat, etc.
3. Invite the peace of God with prayer and thanksgiving (vv. 6b-7). That doesn’t mean you need to prepare a devotional, but at least draw attention to the fact of God’s goodness evident among you.
4. Enjoy what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or worthy of praise (v. 8) Let these things guide your conversation more than the general cares of life. Focus on future dreams, hobbies, exciting life events, or any good gift of God

In his book *Recapturing the Wonder*, Mike Cospers draws up eight “ground rules” for feasting. (1) Turn off your phones. (2) Do not count calories, carbs, or “any other nonsense.” (3) Make some buttered noodles (or something simple) for the kids. (4) Conversations should be driven by joy. (5) Plan for abundance. (6) Don’t worry about place settings, tidying up just right, or impressing. (7) Call attention to the feast as a gift from God. (8) Give yourself grace because this is a practice.

## **Light a Candle**

### ***What?***

Light a candle every day and pray: “May we hope in the true light, which has come and is coming again, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

### **Why?**

Physical darkness can be suffocating, crushing. Emotional or spiritual darkness even more so. But the faintest glimmer of light, as dim as it may be, shines like a beacon to the burdened soul, calling them onward in hope. And there is no truer light, no firmer hope than the light of the world, Jesus Christ. He promises that whoever follows him “will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Indeed, one day the whole world will bask in his glorious light (Revelation 21:23). In lighting a candle and repeating these words, we visibly remind ourselves of the hope we have in him who overcomes the darkness (John 1:5).

### **How?**

The logistics are simple enough: Decide on a time in which the whole household can participate, take any candle, light it, say the words. But the point is not simply in lighting the candle and repeating some phrases, as if these produce hope by some kind of magic. They don't. The point is to direct our hearts towards the light of Christ and enlarge our hope in him. What does that mean for this practice?

It means that your attitude and intention matter. Perhaps prepare your heart with prayer beforehand or follow the practice with a prayer. Or, take a moment of silence to reflect on the meaning of Christ as our light and hope. You could also pair this practice with a reading from Scripture. Build out this practice in any way that helps you to focus your hope on Jesus.

For those who want to pair this practice with Scripture reading, consider these texts:

- Psalm 18:25-30; 27:1-14; 37:1-7; 56:8-13
- Isaiah 9:2-7; 42:16-17; 60:18-22
- John 1:1-18; 8:12; 12:27-36
- Romans 5:1-2
- 1 Corinthians 15:19-26
- Ephesians 2:11-22
- Titus 2:11-14
- 1 Peter 1:3-5
- Revelation 21:22-27; 22:5

(You might also consider lighting the candles of an [Advent wreath](#) throughout this season.)

## **Share the Gospel**

### **What?**

Intentionally share the good news of Jesus Christ with one person this week.

### **Why?**

God is forgiving sin and healing the world of sin's corrupting influence through his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the good news that every person who has placed their confidence in him has experienced personally. While we ought to be ready to make a defense for the hope we have in him at any time (1 Peter 3:15), following Jesus' command to make disciples (Matt 28:19) requires that we actively, intentionally share the gospel as well. Loving our neighbor includes

caring for their physical needs but extends beyond this to care for their eternal spiritual need for God.

**How?**

## **Expand Your Knowledge**

**What?**

Enlarge your wonder at the wisdom of God by expanding your knowledge of his world in one particular subject.

**Why?**

Humans struggle with the sin of arrival. We too often believe that we have arrived — that all the mysteries of creation have been revealed, that we know all there is to know. In mastering a few subjects or skills, we act as masters of the universe. In reality, the universe overflows with complexity and beauty beyond what our tiny minds can apprehend, and the Creator, who spoke it all into being, must surely surpass his creation in grandeur. So when we set our minds to explore some aspect of God's world that lies outside our current understanding and expertise, we remind ourselves not only of our limited capacities but also of his infinite wisdom in devising such an incredibly vast world.

**How?**

This practice is fairly simple: Pick a subject — as broad as “music” or as specific as “the impact of different materials in making acoustic guitars.” Designate some time to learn. Find a credible source (an article, a book, a video). Dig in. Reflect on the wisdom and greatness of God.

You may find this beneficial to make this a communal practice. Gather a group of friends to learn about something, and discuss your insights together. Or do a sort of knowledge exchange with a friend who has a different area of expertise. This would not only promote accountability but also help us keep the practice God-centered as we reflect together on the wisdom of God evident in our newly discovered subject.

## **Meditate on God's Attributes and Works**

**What?**

Write down one true thing about God every day and meditate on this attribute or work of God.

**Why?**

Often without our being aware, images and songs, symbols and speeches, and the habits and patterns of our life dance before our imagination, shaping us to place ourselves at the center of our universe, the power that can create our own reality, that can shape our own destiny.

But we make poor gods. And so we must fill our imagination with visions of the true God revealed in the pages of Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. By setting our minds on him, we begin to counter the self-centeredness of our culture and to turn our focus — and ultimately our trust and hopes — to him.

### **How?**

The most effective way to do this (so that we do not simply write down what we *think* is true about God but what is *actually* true about him) is to pray that the Holy Spirit would reveal himself to you through the Word. Then, as you read Scripture, be sensitive to what the Lord says about himself. Does the passage of Scripture you choose to read state an explicit attribute of God? If not, ask questions like: What kind of promises does he make or fulfill? What does he desire for his people? How does he respond to the faithful? The unfaithful? Are there particular images or metaphors used to describe him?

(You can also consider this [list of characteristics of God](#) with brief definitions and corresponding Scriptures.)

As the Lord reveals himself in his Word, allow your imagination to marinate in that particular attribute or work. There isn't one specific way to do this, but here are a few things to consider:

- Envision God with that attribute. Really picture him as loving or almighty or eternal.
- Consider other Scriptures that speak of that attribute. Does anything else that you have heard or read about that aspect of God come to mind?
- Ask yourself what it really means that God is X. Think through the implications. Ask, "If God is X, then..."
- Think about how that attribute is expressed throughout Scripture. How has it been expressed in your life?
- What affections fill you as you ponder upon God? Why is that? Sit on these things.
- Think about the things you tend to make god. How do they stack up?
- If we are called to godliness, how does your life compare?
- How would your life change if you really believed that God was truly merciful, just, or all-wise?
- You might make a resolution to do something in particular to bring your life into line with the truth you are meditating upon.
- Pray a prayer of praise or thankfulness, or confess the ways in which you neglect or turn from God.

If you find that your mind wanders, do not worry about it. Simply acknowledge that your mind has wandered then turn back to filling your mind with truth about God.

## **Hospitality**

### **What?**

Open up your home to one or more people who are outside your normal friend group.



## **Why?**

We are creatures; God is the Creator. We are sinners; God is holy. Despite these differences, God took on our nature, died for our sins, and welcomed us into his family. He did not ignore us, look down on us with contempt, or entirely exclude us from his presence forever. Rather, he displayed divine hospitality, making room for and befriending strangers and sinners. He now invites us to do the same, extending his welcoming love to others. As we practice opening our doors to others, we learn to resist our tendency towards both self-centeredness and tribalism (the us-versus-them mentality) because it becomes part of our regular rhythm of life to engage our world in love, transforming strangers and outcasts into friends through the grace of Christ working itself out in every interaction.

## **How?**

We must recognize, firstly, that practicing hospitality is not the same as entertaining guests. Jen Wilkin [breaks down the differences](#) concisely:

Entertaining is always thinking about the next course. Hospitality burns the rolls because it was listening to a story.

Entertaining obsesses over what went wrong. Hospitality savors what was shared.

Entertaining, exhausted, says "It was nothing, really!" Hospitality thinks it was nothing. Really.

Entertaining seeks to impress. Hospitality seeks to bless.

That last point is essential. Hospitality is not about creating the "perfect" evening with a spotless house and culinary masterpiece. It's about making your home feel like home to others, especially those who look and think and act differently.

This will come naturally to some and be more of a struggle for others, but all of us can prayerfully take steps towards cultivating a heart of hospitality.

1. Start with prayer. Pray that the Lord would give you a generous, hospitable heart that desires to welcome the stranger, and pray that he would direct you to specific "others" whom you can befriend and love.
2. List out ways in which people might differ from you (e.g., age, gender, nationality, political affiliation, life stage, health choices, tastes/likes, neighborhood, etc.). Is the Lord leading you to reach out to someone who is different or "other" in one of the ways you listed?
3. Prayerfully find a specific person or persons who is "other," and invite them into your home.
4. Open up your home and make them feel not as a guest but as a friend.