

A Short Primer on some Neglected Spiritual Practices

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have cultivated their relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through a variety of practices. Some are very familiar (like Bible Reading, Prayer, Fasting and Serving), while others are less familiar (like the ones described below). As you experiment with new spiritual practices, it's important to remember a few things: 1) the goal of spiritual practices is never the practice itself, but rather intimacy with God 2) many practices become richer and deeper when we experience them with others, rather than by ourselves and 3) like any other discipline, the spiritual disciplines don't come easy. Don't be discouraged if you find any new practice difficult at first. You probably didn't run a 6 minute mile the first time. Persevere, and don't be discouraged.

Centering Prayer. Centering Prayer reminds us that prayer is a conversation that involves listening to God. One way to engage in centering prayer is to meditate on one of God's attributes (holy, just, sovereign, etc.) or one of the Bible's metaphors for God (prince of peace, mother hen, beginning and end, Father of lights, etc.). As you focus on that one attribute or metaphor, ask God to speak to your life through it. If your mind wanders, come back to that one thing (the center of your prayer). Resist the urge to do the talking. Allow God to speak to you through that one thing.

Doodling Prayer. This is a great practice for those who are a little more right brained and who have a hard time staying focused with eyes closed. On one side of a sheet of paper, write down the name of a person you care for—someone who does not yet know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Doodle around their name as you think about and pray for that person. On the side of the same sheet of paper, write down an attribute of God. Doodle around that one word and meditate on that particular aspect of His character. Then doodle across the page, connecting the name and the attribute of God, while praying for God to reveal that part of His character to the person you've named.

Ignatian Bible Reading. St. Ignatius taught people to let the stories of Scripture engage their senses and imaginations such that they began to place themselves within the story. Find a story in the gospels and read it slowly three times. Close your eyes and imagine the scene—the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and sensations. Imagine yourself as part of the scene—as one of the characters, or just an onlooker. What impact does Jesus have on you? Does He address you directly? Does He acknowledge you in any way? How are you drawn to Him and why? A great place to start may be Matthew 3:13-17.

Lectio Divina. Literally 'sacred reading' – Lectio teaches us to slow down and immerse our minds, imaginations and hearts in the Scriptures. Pick a short passage of Scripture that stands alone. Read it slowly, one or more times each as you progress through the following stages of reading:

- **Lectio** (reverential reading)—listening attentively to God's voice. This is very different from speed-reading or reading for content.
- **Meditatio** (meditation)—ponder in your heart what God is saying to you through His Word. What does it say to your thoughts, hopes, memories, desires, cares?
- **Oratio** (prayer)—enter into a two-way, loving conversation with the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit. What is God saying to you? What do you need to do in response? Confess? Repent? Praise? Forgive? Act? Trust? Surrender? Open your heart and lay it bare before your creator. Allow God's Word and Spirit to probe you deeply and change you.
- **Contemplatio** (contemplation)—Allow your spirit to rest in God, to rest in His embrace. Allow His Spirit and His love to wash over you and spend time in His presence, without words. Let go of your worries, questions and agendas, and simply be in His renewing, life-giving presence. There are often moments in a loving relationship when words are unnecessary.

Some Recommended Books & Resources to Help Nurture Your Spiritual Formation:

- www.renovare.us – a wonderful collection of resources for spiritual transformation
- **Life with God:** Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation (Richard Foster)
- **Eat this Book:** A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading (Eugene Peterson)
- **Prayer:** Finding the Heart's True Home (Richard Foster)
- **The Spirit of the Disciplines** (Dallas Willard)
- **Celebration of Discipline:** The Path to Spiritual Growth (Richard Foster)
- **The Practice of the Presence of God** (Brother Lawrence)
- **Enjoy the Silence:** A Thirty Day Experiment in Listening to God (Duffy Robbins) – *great for teens!*