



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES GUIDE

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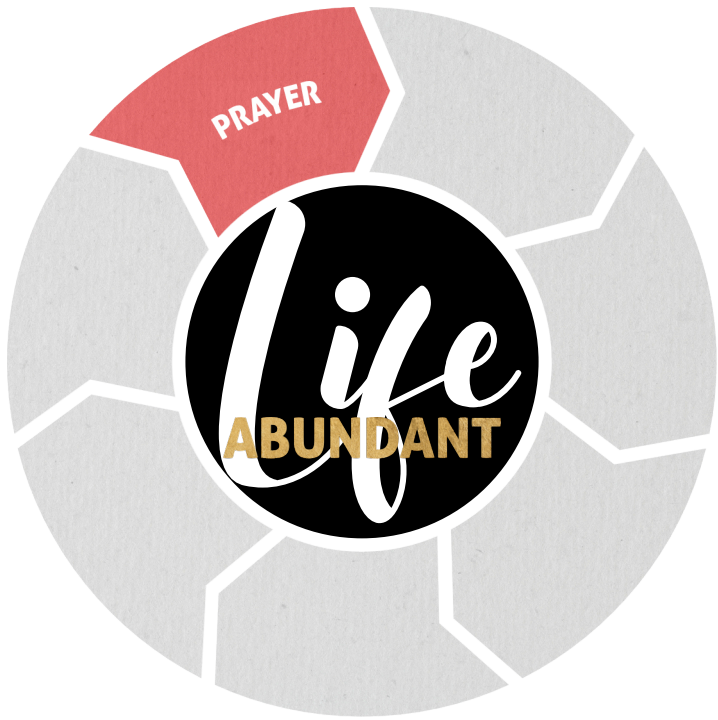
INTRODUCTION

Jesus said in John chapter 10, verse 10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Jesus came into our world to help us live more full, more abundant lives. He didn't come to give us a laundry list of tasks, or to burden us with rules and regulations. Instead, Jesus came to invite us into a deeper life with Him. When we spend more of our time with Him, we encounter this promise first hand.

In this spiritual practices guide, we'll take a look at seven themes and 35 different practices for us to 'try on' and encounter Jesus. You may have done some of these before, but we're inviting you to test the waters, try something new, and experience what it looks like to move into a life abundant through spending time with God. Please don't try on every practice in this book right away. Our hope is that you'll develop a healthy rhythm of practices that encourage you to go deeper with God every day. And some of these may feel difficult at first! That's ok, because just like going to the gym, or changing the way you eat, hard work always pays off.

It may seem counterintuitive. 'But my life is so busy, I can't afford to add more to it!' That's ok too! Start small, find a couple of practices to begin with. The truth is, our busyness often interrupts our life with God. But the beautiful, backwards nature of God's Kingdom is when we make even a little time for Him, He shows up and brings rest and fulfillment, rather than more busyness and exhaustion.

As you go through this guide, continually ask God to highlight practices that will help you connect with Him. And know that we are praying for you as you work on engaging with Jesus in fresh, new ways. May the LORD fill you with grace and peace, and may He lead you into an abundant life.



PRAYER

EXAMEN

Examen is a contemplative prayer practice where you spend time in quiet reflection, remembering different moments from throughout your day. As you think through your day, you may be carrying joy from good experiences, or perhaps grief or frustration from difficult ones. As a practice, examen helps us step back and take a look at our day through the lens of Jesus, and where He was active and present throughout our day (He was, even if we don't feel like it!). As you try on examen, be completely honest with yourself and God. If it feels awkward at first, that's ok! Remember, this is a practice, and it may take some time to get used to thinking and praying this way.

What would it be like for you to practice this each evening as your day winds down? How might this practice help you see God at work in your life?

HOW TO PRACTICE EXAMEN

Step 1: Be Still

Invite God into your time, and be still in His presence.

Step 2: Be Thankful

Think back through your day with gratitude. What are you thankful for? Where did you see God at work?

Step 3: Be Aware

Remember your emotions and experiences from the day. What brought you closer to God? What drove you further from God?

Step 4: Be Honest

Settle with one of those moments to pray about. Do you need to seek forgiveness or make things right?

Step 5: Be Hopeful

Imagine what you hope for tomorrow and share that with God.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

INTERCESSION

Intercession as a spiritual practice is merely praying on another person's behalf. If you've ever prayed for someone who's sick, or in need, or even for them to encounter Jesus, those are all examples of intercessory prayer. Developing intercession as a spiritual practice does more than just bring change to those we're praying for, it also changes us! The more that we pray for others, the more our hearts become like God's, with compassion, mercy, and trust.

Can you imagine people in your life who need prayer? Do you believe God answers our prayers? What might your friends' lives be like if you regularly prayed for them? How might God show up in their lives?

HOW TO PRACTICE INTERCESSION

Step 1: Invite God's presence

Invite God into your time, and be still in His presence. He's already present and at work, become aware of His presence near you.

Step 2: Ask God to bring people to mind

Who comes to mind? A friend? A family member? One thing we can trust is when we ask God who we should pray for, He will bring people to mind.

Step 3: Ask God what you should pray for

Spend a few minutes listening for God's voice. Is He inviting you to pray for something in particular? Has anything come to mind? Turn those words and thoughts into a prayer on behalf of who you're praying for.

Step 4: Pray for what you know is needed

Does the person you're praying for need something specific? Have they asked you to pray? Take a few minutes asking God to move in the ways they need.

Step 5: Thank God for what He is doing

As you wrap up, thank God for what He's already at work doing, and ask for more! If it's healing, ask for more healing, if it's ministering, ask for more, if it's provision, ask for more! Then thank God for who He is and how He's at work.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SILENCE & LISTENING

Silence and listening is a spiritual practice with the intent of helping you listen for the voice of God. Our lives are consistently loud, chaotic, and full of distractions. When we practice silence and listening, we're taking a moment to turn off the distractions, settle our hearts, and listen, with faith and trust, for what God is speaking to us.

Do you hear the voice of God? Is it easier to listen for Him in the chaos of the day or in a set apart time? If you could hear God's voice (you can!), what do you think He'd say to you?

HOW TO PRACTICE SILENCE & LISTENING

Step 1: Make space

The first, and hardest, step in silence and listening is making space for quiet. Set aside an hour in your schedule to be completely still and quiet.

Step 2: Get Comfortable

As you begin, settle somewhere comfortable and quiet. Try to remove any distractions from around you. i.e. put your phone in 'do not disturb' mode, turn off the TV. If you get distracted, that's ok, recenter each time and settle your mind again.

Step 3: Invite God to be with you

Of course, God is always with us, but inviting God into our time helps us make room for Him in our lives, and God is always ready to meet us when we're ready for Him.

Step 4: Listen for God's voice

How does God speak to you? For most, that won't be a loud, booming voice, but a quiet thought in the back of your mind. Or it could be through images or scenes playing out, or a word or phrase that keeps coming up.

Step 5: Wait

The last step, waiting, can also be difficult. In our modern lives, where we can have anything we want as soon as we want it, we sometimes get impatient with waiting for God. But He will speak, we just have to have patience, faith, and trust!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

JOURNALING

Journaling is a spiritual practice to help us keep track of where God is moving in our lives, how He's answered prayer, and how He's changing our hearts. Of all of the prayer practices, journaling is probably the most familiar to you. Have you ever kept a diary or journal of memories from your life? This is just like that, but with a focus on God and what He's doing in your life. In the future, you'll be able to come back to your journal entries to reflect on the ways God has shown up!

How has God been at work in your past? How have you seen God move when you needed Him to? Are those moments easy to remember, or are there moments you've forgotten?

HOW TO PRACTICE JOURNALING

Step 1: Set aside time

As you plan your time, make sure to set aside enough time to be able to write with honesty and thoughtfulness.

Step 2: Settle and be still

Spend a few minutes clearing your mind and settling your body so you're ready to hear from God.

Step 3: Invite God's presence

As you begin your time, invite God to speak to you. Invite Him to remind you of moments from the day or the week. Ask Him to show you how He was at work throughout your week.

Step 4: Write what you experience

When things begin coming to mind, or as events replay in your head, write down what you feel that God is speaking to you. It could be a word or phrase, maybe an event where you responded poorly, or it could be witnessing someone be healed. Write down what you experience. And make sure to date your entry for future reflection!

Step 5: Spend time in gratitude

After you've spent time writing, turn those words into a prayer. How can you thank God for what He's done? What do you need to ask Him for? What are you asking Him to do?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

LAMENT

The practice of lament can often be uncomfortable, difficult, and full of grief. Whether it's from unanswered prayer, a difficult life situation, loss, or waiting for God to move, we can easily avoid lament and the challenging feelings and experiences it can bring. However, throughout God's Word, especially the Psalms, we see God's people engaging with Him, expressing emotions, and telling Him exactly how they feel (Psalms 13, 22, 44, and more, Job, Lamentations). As we practice lament and welcoming God into our sadness and disappointment, we call out to God and invite Him into the middle of what we're experiencing.

Where do you need God to move in your life? Are there unanswered prayers you're hoping He'll answer? How are you hurting, longing, or expecting God to do something?

HOW TO PRACTICE LAMENT

Step 1: Invite God's presence

As you invite Him to be with you, remind yourself of His goodness and truth. What attributes of God do you believe to be true? i.e. "God, the Good Father", "God, savior, deliverer"

Step 2: Welcome what you are feeling

When experiencing deep and difficult emotions like grief and lament, don't shy away from their impact. Be honest with God about how you feel and what you are experiencing (He already knows!).

Step 3: Acknowledge your trust in God

In this moment, remember where God has shown up in your life in the past, how He's healed you, answered prayer, or provided for you.

Step 4: Ask God for what you need and hope for

Take the pain, longing, and even disappointment you may be feeling, and ask God to intervene, move, or give you what you need.

Step 5: Thank God for hearing you

Thank God for what He is doing, even if you can't see it. Thank Him for what He is going to do, and trust that He has heard you.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY

The practice of community is perhaps the most ambiguous of all the practices. Community simply means being together with others. So what does this practice look like? In actuality, community runs through every single practice in some form or another! Life with Jesus, this life abundant, centers itself on community. The Church is a community of believers, all working together to share the good news of Jesus and grow in their faith **together**. So how do we practice this in a spiritual way in our every day lives? As you try on the practice of community itself, remember, it has to be done with others...there's no way to do this alone! And it can take on various forms, so feel free to experiment, try out new things, and see to what spaces God is inviting you.

What communities are you already a part of? Do your communities regularly invite Jesus to be a part? Or is He completely separate from your gatherings? What would it look like to invite Jesus into your existing spaces?

HOW TO PRACTICE COMMUNITY

Step 1: Find people

Remember, this can't be done alone...but it doesn't have to be done with other followers of Jesus. It could be your work friends, kid's soccer families, your neighbors next door, etc.

Step 2: Set an intentional time

Plan a gathering with people, and set aside some intentional time to make room for Jesus. It could be a simple prayer, deeper questions, or studying the Bible. Feel free to 'test the waters' with the group.

Step 3: There isn't a step three!

Seriously, it's that easy. Find people and make space for Jesus. You can try any of the practices in this guide together, or simply ask what they think about God. Jesus can speak to anyone, anytime, anywhere; we don't have to make it so complicated!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality as a practice is living out the mission of Jesus in our every day lives. It's 'loving our neighbor' by '[doing] to others what you want done to you.' (Matt 22:39 & 7:12) The Church itself is rooted in the idea of bringing God's hospitality to life in the world around us. Throughout scripture, God is continually, and abundantly, providing for His people AND unexpectedly, their enemies! So what does hospitality look like for us as a practice? It's creating spaces where people, whether friends, outsiders, or enemies, feel safe, cared for, and loved, and where they can experience the love of Jesus through our actions.

What spaces have you experienced surprising hospitality in your life? How did those spaces make you feel? What would it be like for you to create a space like that?

HOW TO PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

Step 1: Be willing

Are you willing to invite people into your home? Make some room, tidy up, prepare for people, and be willing to be humble about what you have...or don't have!

Step 2: Invite people

Who are you going to invite? Pray and ask God who He would have you share life with. And then actually invite them and plan a time to get together!

Step 3: Pray for them

Whoever you invited, take time before they arrive to pray for them. Ask God to give you His heart for them and to move in their life.

Step 4: Be warm and welcoming

Wait outside for them to arrive, have everyone in your home ready to greet them, make your space as ready for them as you can, whatever you can do to make them feel like you want them there!

Step 5: Go all out

This doesn't mean expensive or gaudy...but serving them as if you were serving Jesus Himself! Care for them well, make their favorite meal...hospitality is loving people.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

FAMILY

Family is a word we don't typically associate as a practice. Like community at the beginning of this chapter, this is something we all experience in some aspect, most days of our lives. As a spiritual practice however, time with family is vital in growing in our relationship with Jesus and with each other. As you think through your life, your family may not be in a good place. You may have wounding or trauma. You may have emotional baggage and hurts that come up. Or you may have only positive thoughts and excitement as you remember them. Wherever your mind goes when you think of family, there's an opportunity from God to step into your family's situation, whatever it may be, to bring peace, hope, and love to those around you.

Do you have a positive view of your family or painful? What would it look like for God to be at the center of your family, whether extended or immediate? Where do you need God to show up in your family?

HOW TO PRACTICE FAMILY

Step 1: Pray

Invite God to be with you and your family. If your other family members aren't followers of Jesus, pray specifically that He would reveal Himself to them.

Step 2: Be intentional

Spend time with your family that is intentional and planned. Like community and hospitality, what would it be like to have time set aside for your family to love and engage with each other well?

Step 3: Practice together

If your family is following Jesus together, find a practice or two from this guide that you can do together. If you have kids, find one to do with them and help them engage with Jesus.

Step 4: Work together

*If your family isn't following Jesus, or maybe you're not used to these habits, work together toward **something**. Whether it's finding ways to love each other better, bring healing to old wounds, or restoration to a broken relationship, what can you do **together**?*

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SOLITUDE

Solitude is the practice of being alone with God. 'But wait...' you ask, 'isn't this about community?' Great question! Solitude fits with the theme of community because it is community with God. Solitude isn't about spending time alone so you can collect your thoughts, or deny yourself the presence of others. It's a practice to help us experience direct communion with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the perfect example of community, and solitude gives us a chance to remove the distractions, noise, and chaos of our lives and become more aware of God's presence. We spend time alone with God so we can better separate His voice from the voice of the world around us.

When was the last time you were alone with God? How often are you able to make that happen? Do you hear better from God in solitude? or in community?

HOW TO PRACTICE SOLITUDE

Step 1: Plan a time and place

Intentionality is important! Plan a time in your schedule where you can get away and be alone. Find somewhere that you'll be removed from the noise of the world, but also from other people.

Step 2: Get rid of distractions

The main idea of solitude is being alone. Turn off that phone or device so you can have some uninterrupted time with God.

Step 3: Invite God into your time

As you begin your time alone with God, invite Him! Invite Him to speak to you, remind you of things, and highlight scripture to you.

Step 4: Be yourself

While silence often pairs well with solitude, you don't have to be quiet. If you like to sing, sing to God! If you like scripture, read it aloud! Maybe even try having a conversation with God out loud.

Step 5: Be honest

God wants you to be honest with Him. If you struggle with something, tell Him. If you're hurting, tell Him. If you're full of joy, thank Him!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

CELEBRATION

Celebration is the practice of reflecting on and remembering what God has done for us, our communities, and the world. As a community, it's helpful for each of us, together, to remember the ways God has shown up in our lives. It moves us from a world where we're concerned with what we don't have, or what we're lacking, to a place of gratitude and thanksgiving for what God has done and is doing in our lives. When we celebrate together, we all get to share in the wonderful things happening in the lives of those around us, even when ours may feel hard or challenging.

What has God done for you that's worth celebrating? How have your family or friends experienced God's goodness? When was the last time you 'let loose' and freely celebrated God's goodness?

HOW TO PRACTICE CELEBRATION

Step 1: Gather together

While you can certainly celebrate alone, celebration with others brings a community closer together, and will share the joy you are experiencing with those around you.

Step 2: Be free

What would it look like to freely express your excitement/happiness/joy to God? Singing? Serving? A party? An amazing meal?

Step 3: Practice joy

If you're struggling with a heaviness or hurt, give that to God. Listen to and celebrate the stories of God working in others' lives for encouragement and hope for your situation.

Step 4: Point to God

In celebrating, point all of the joy, thankfulness, and gratitude to God. His goodness is unending, and those around us and in our lives deserve to hear about it!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



SCRIPTURE

DEVOTIONAL READING

Devotional reading as a practice is a direct way for each of us to engage with God's Word. When we set aside time to not just read the Bible, but to think about the depth, history, and wisdom that comes from focusing on scripture. When you practice devotional reading, think about how it's impacting you, what God is speaking. What has the church said about the passage historically? What have biblical scholars said? When we study for deeper knowledge through devotional reading, we receive a deeper, richer understanding of God's Word in our own lives and throughout history!

How often do you read scripture? When you read, how do you learn the context of what you're reading? What resources could you use to learn more about a specific verse or book of the Bible?

HOW TO PRACTICE DEVOTIONAL READING

Step 1: Choose scripture

What verses or book will you be reading? If you're unsure where to start, pray about it, and see if God brings something to mind.

Step 2: Set aside time

Devotional reading goes beyond quickly skimming the text; it's a deeper study of what was written. Give enough time to study!

Step 3: Gather resources

Whether it's a book about what you're reading, a Bible with commentary, or even an online search, take your study deeper with resources from theologians and Bible scholars.

Step 4: Read it multiple times

Whatever scripture you're reading, read through it more than once. As you become more familiar with verses, you'll be surprised at what jumps out at you when you read it again!

Step 5: Pray

Throughout your experience reading, keep an open dialogue with God. What is He saying to you? What questions do you have for Him?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

MEMORIZATION

Memorization is the practice of intentionally committing God's Word to memory. Reading and focusing on scripture is a healthy part of life with Jesus, but memorization takes it even further. In Psalm 119 the psalmist says they have memorized God's word to help them live a more holy life. When we commit to memorizing scripture, God's Word goes with us everywhere! And the more we internalize and remember scripture, the more our lives are shaped by the very words of God...and the more we can help shape others!

Do you have any scripture memorized? What is your favorite verse? How might you respond to situations differently if God's Word was tucked away in your mind?

HOW TO PRACTICE MEMORIZATION

Step 1: Start small

What is a verse that has always stuck with you? Try memorizing some of your favorites first.

Step 2: Consider context

Sometimes, the more popular scriptures we have memorized have lost the context. Try adding a few of the verses around the ones you know.

Step 3: Practice more

Are you a visual or auditory learner? Try saying them out loud instead of just reading them. Or maybe even write it down a few times in a journal.

Step 4: Try new things

Some people like to create hand motions to remind them of the scripture, or maybe you like to sing...try singing it to a song you like.

Step 5: Go big...when you're ready

Once you've memorized some verses, what would it be like to memorize a whole chapter...or even a whole book!?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

MEDITATION

Meditation is the practice of focusing all of our attention on God, what He's speaking, and His Word through scripture. You may have a mental connection between meditation and eastern religions, but really, it's a practice fully devoted and dedicated to looking at God. Unlike the other religions, we're not emptying our mind to focus on self, we're focusing solely on the creator of the universe and where He's at work in our world. Meditation is a way for us to tune out what's happening around us and become more and more aware of God's presence in our lives. As you open your mind to trying on this practice, you may find yourself easily distracted...that's ok! Keep returning to God and focusing on His presence with you!

What have your experiences with meditation been like? Have you spent time focusing on God? How do you help yourself pay attention and stay focused?

HOW TO PRACTICE MEDITATION

Step 1: Settle

Find a quiet space and time in your schedule and settle. Try breathing practices to help your body and mind match your heart's posture of focus.

Step 2: Slow down

You can't hurry through meditation. This practice requires us to reduce hurry and distraction to better focus on God.

Step 3: Choose scripture

Find a passage of scripture to focus on. If you find yourself distracted or removed from what you're reading, keep returning to it.

Step 4: Release

As you focus on God and the scripture you've chosen, release all other things to God...your to-do list, chores, work, thoughts...give it all to God.

Step 5: Pray

As you wind down your time of meditation, thank God for what you see. Thank Him for the ways He's speaking to you. Take what He's given you in this time and turn it into praise.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio divina (Latin for 'read' and 'divine') is an ancient practice, recorded as early as the 6th century. It's inviting God to speak to us, in this exact moment of our lives, as we read His word. As we practice lectio, we're not digging deep into the meaning of scripture or pouring over the historicity or modern meaning, but we're engaging with God as we read, asking Him to point out specific things. As you practice, you may be surprised how God can use His Word to speak to us in unexpected and new ways. A passage you've read dozens of times may have new meaning and connection when God highlights a word or phrase to you. This practice has five steps, and can be practiced on any section of scripture, but typically shorter is better.

When was the last time you invited God to speak to you through a specific scripture? What would it be like to have God highlight something specifically for you?

HOW TO PRACTICE LECTIO DIVINA

Step 1: Be still and quiet

Acknowledge God's presence, and quiet your heart and mind to recognize His voice.

Step 2: Read, out loud

Whatever scripture you've chosen, take a moment to read it slowly, out loud. What word or phrase sticks out to you? Don't over analyze or think too hard...what jumps out at you?

Step 3: Focus

Read the passage out loud again, this time focusing on God's invitation to you. What word or phrase strikes you?

Step 4: Respond

Read the passage a third time, out loud. What has God highlighted? Have a conversation with God about that. What is He saying to you?

Step 5: Rest

Spend some time resting in God's presence. Let the word or phrase He's highlighted soak into your mind and heart. As you finish, think about this word or phrase throughout the day.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

S.O.A.P.

The practice of S.O.A.P. is an acrostic. It stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. When we practice this method of reading, we're spending time looking for what God is doing and saying through scripture. As we dig deeper into God's Word, we notice things we maybe haven't seen or thought of before. Our observations of the scripture we're reading change and take on new light and continually point to God's bigger story in our world. But we don't want to leave it there! We want to apply what we've learned and turn those thoughts to prayer. S.O.A.P. will bring the Bible to life, and also bring you abundant life with Jesus.

When have you read God's Word and intentionally written down your observations? What is it like when you put those observations into practice?

HOW TO PRACTICE S.O.A.P.

Step 1: Scripture

Take time to write out the scripture you're reading. Not just copy and paste from online to your notes, but with a pen and paper!

Step 2: Observation

What do you see happening? What do you notice? Are there words repeating? Who was this scripture written to?

Step 3: Application

What is God saying to you today about this verse? From what you just read, are there action steps for you to take?

Step 4: Prayer

Take a moment and pray what God has shown you.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



FASTING

EATING & DRINKING

Fasting as a practice is most often known as forgoing eating and drinking for an extended period of time. When we look back through the history of scripture, fasting has long been a part of both Jewish and Christian traditions. As we practice denying ourselves food and drink, we begin to see where certain things control us or motivate us. Eating and drinking is absolutely a necessary part of life, but when we forgo those things and experience hunger and thirst, we can turn that into a prayer of gratitude and thankfulness to God. And the goal of fasting is not to punish our bodies for the things we naturally need, but to help create physical reminders of our need and dependence on God to provide and care for us. **Please consult your physician or doctor before jumping into a prolonged fast!*

How does eating for pleasure differ from eating for necessity? Where are areas of your life where food/drink gets in the way of seeing God?

HOW TO PRACTICE FASTING FROM EATING & DRINKING

Step 1: Plan your time

Set aside some time to be intentional about your fast. How long will you fast from food and drink?

Step 2: Grab your Bible

During your time, keep your Bible handy, and perhaps a glass of water. Invite God to speak to you during your fast.

Step 3: Pray

As you experience hunger, or a desire to eat, turn that into a prayer of thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done for you.

Don't do these:

If you haven't fasted before, don't go for more than a day. Work on building up if you feel like God is inviting you to a longer fast.

Don't use a fast to try to force God's hand. A fast is meant to bring our heart into alignment with His, not to make God do something.

Don't fast in a hurry. A fast is meant to slow us down and make us aware of God's presence.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SIMPLICITY

Simplicity is the practice of letting go of the busyness of our lives and embracing life with less. We live in a world filled with messages, emails, appointments, and calls. We're surrounded by computers, phones, TVs, and stereos. But what if there is more to life...by having less? doing less? The practice of simplicity encourages us to downsize/let go/get rid of the excess in our lives. It encourages us to slow down and find joy in the simple things of life. If you look at how much 'stuff' you have, and how full your calendar is, simplicity encourages us to let go of whatever gets in the way of our relationship with God. It also points to life with Jesus as the most important thing. The more we let go of excess things and activities in our lives to make room for Jesus, the more He fills us with abundant life!

What in your life do you take for granted? How attached are you to the things you have or the activities you do? What would it be like to give up or give away some of those things?

HOW TO PRACTICE SIMPLICITY

Step 1: Take inventory

Take a simple inventory of your life, either your schedule or your stuff (...or both). Where do you need to make room for Jesus?

Step 2: Ask God

As you look at all you have or all you do, invite God to speak to you about what's getting in the way of your relationship with Him.

Step 3: Let go

What has God asked you to let go of? What's one way you can free up your schedule this week?

Step 4: Make space

When you've given those things away, or made space on your calendar, don't rush to fill the void! Make time and space to spend with God, enjoying Him through simplicity!

Step 5: Experience freedom

The more we clear out our cluttered lives, the more we experience freedom from greed or envy, and we make more room for Jesus!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SECRECY

Secrecy as a practice sounds mysterious and misleading. As we follow Jesus, aren't we supposed to be truthful and open? When you practice secrecy, the intention is not to hide portions of your life, but is instead an opportunity to avoid accolades, rewards, or acknowledgment for your actions and thoughts. Many times throughout Jesus' ministry, He instructed those He healed to not tell anyone. Jesus wasn't on earth to build His platform or His notoriety, but instead to serve humbly, and make room at the table for **everyone**. When you practice secrecy, you may find that your need to be known and seen begins to weaken. You may experience a deeper connection with God when you share things only with Him! Should secrecy take over our entire lives? Certainly not! It's good to share what God is doing...but it's also important to make sure we aren't making ourselves the focus of our own story.

When you have conversations with people, what would it be like to not share unsolicited opinions? What would it be like to not have to compete for attention?

HOW TO PRACTICE SECRECY

Step 1: Pray

Invite God to bring someone or a situation to mind. How could you serve that person this week?

Step 2: Serve

*Whether that's volunteering for a task or giving a tangible gift, practice serving someone **anonymously**. How does it feel to not receive attention for your service?*

Step 3: Respond

Take a moment and journal your thoughts and feelings about helping someone in secret. What was it like for you?

Step 4: Repeat

Try this on again and again. The more we practice secrecy, the more we wear down the world's message that we deserve attention and importance!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

DETACHMENT

Detachment is the practice of letting go of all the things that get in the way of our relationship with God. Our lives are filled with distractions, both good and bad, and many of these attachments get in the way of how we connect with God. When we practice detachment, we're removing those unhealthy distractions and making intentional space for God to move in our lives. Jesus showed us a beautiful example of detachment. Wherever He went, He never let the things of this world get in the way of His connection to God. He continually looked for what the Father was doing (John 5:19-20). As we learn and practice detachment, we invite God to take precedence in our lives and remove what gets in His way. And the more that we let go of those things, the more we will trust that God has things under control.

In your life, what gets in the way of God? What takes up most of your time? What would it be like to donate it/gift it/give it away?

HOW TO PRACTICE DETACHMENT

Step 1: Pray

Spend some time in prayer asking God what is getting in the way of your relationship with Him. Ask Him to show you what holds your attention.

Step 2: Make a list

Think through your life and write down some of the items that are burdensome or consuming you. What would it be like to give them to God?

Step 3: Take action

If you're willing, take action and get rid of the thing, or things. What feelings are stirred up in you?

Step 4: Be honest

Have a conversation with God about how you're feeling. Be honest with yourself, do you truly rely on God?

Step 5: Let go

As you continue this conversation with God, invite Him to take control. Like Jesus, pray 'not my will but Yours be done.' (Luke 22:42)

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

ABSTINENCE

Abstinence is the practice of withholding something from yourself, abstaining from something. Culturally, abstinence has a sensual connotation, but for our practice, we're talking in a broader scope. In our modern lives, we have everything we need at the tap of a finger. We can have food easily delivered, two-day shipping on any item we could need, and any movie or TV show at our disposal. We've been trained to have whatever we want whenever we want it! So for us, abstinence, as a practice, will teach us that we don't always need everything. Many of the things we think we have to have are just wants, and sometimes it's ok for us to not have them. When we practice abstinence, we're inviting God into our wants and needs, and making space for Him to show us what we really need.

How do you currently deny yourself something you want? Where have you filled your wants with things of the world instead of God? What would it look like to find fulfillment from God instead of media?

HOW TO PRACTICE ABSTINENCE

Step 1: Set aside time

Plan a time when you'll abstain from something. Think about how long you'd like to go without..

Step 2: Pick something

What is it you're going to abstain from? Media? Screen time? Sweets? Unhealthy relationships? What is God highlighting?

Step 3: Invite God

*Throughout your time of abstinence, invite God to speak to you and to fill you with all you **truly** need. What is He showing you in this time?*

Step 4: Return...or not

What has your time away from _____ been like? What has God shown you? Do you want to continue consuming this, or do you feel God's invitation to give it up completely?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

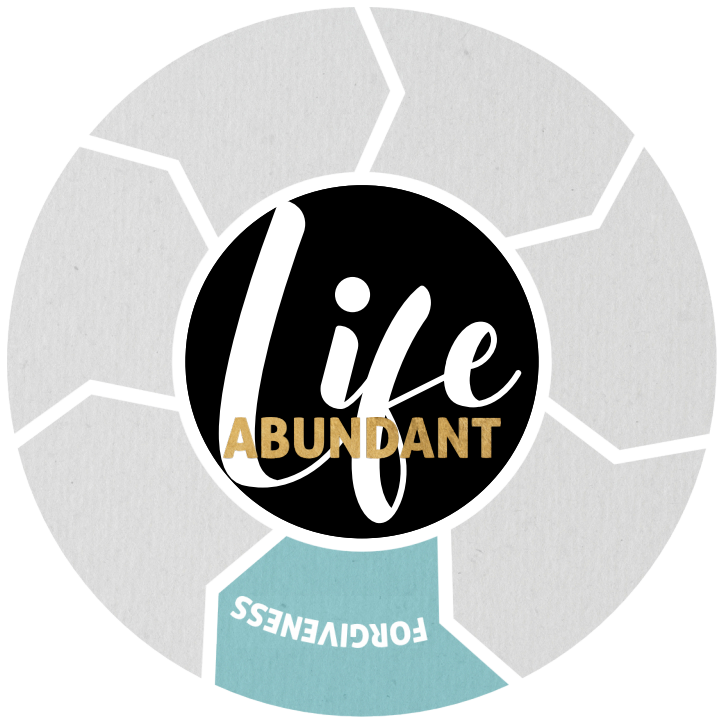
What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



FORGIVENESS

CONFESSION

Confession is a practice where we make space to verbally acknowledge our sin to God and others. Jesus' ministry is filled with language about forgiveness, and confession is a way for each of us to admit where we've messed up. If you grew up Catholic, or you've watched a movie with a Catholic character, you may have experienced going to a confessional booth. For our practice of confession, we are intentionally seeking out others and God to talk about our sin and mistakes as a way of holding ourselves accountable. God already knows of our sin, so confession is a way to acknowledge the sin and remove the power that it and the shame that follows has over our lives. Confession ultimately brings freedom!

When was the last time you confessed a sin to someone else? Who in your life do you trust with the more secret parts of your life?

HOW TO PRACTICE CONFESSION

Step 1: Find a trustworthy friend

Who in your life is trustworthy enough to carry this weight with you? Find someone you feel safe enough with to share honestly.

Step 2: Set aside time

Plan with your friend for a time when you can meet in person. Plan for enough time to have an honest conversation and time for prayer.

Step 3: Be honest and vulnerable

What is it you need to confess? Share with your friend honestly and openly.

Step 4: Pray

Share your sin with God. How can you make it right? What do you need to do to change? Invite God to speak to you.

Step 5: Receive forgiveness

God promises that He is faithful to forgive us when we confess our sin to Him (1 John 1:9). As you confess, receive His forgiveness!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

REPENTANCE

Repentance is a practice much like confession, but with the added step of action. Confession is our first step in receiving forgiveness, and repentance is what follows. The way we're defining repentance is to turn away from your life of sin and move into a life abundant. As you practice repentance, think through your life and where you're most prone to sin. What areas of your life cause temptation? Repentance will lead us to remove those elements from our lives. If you're struggling with lust, find ways to remove temptation. If your sin is hate or anger, turn from your anger to a life of love. When we practice repentance, we're taking action steps to follow through on our confession of sin to God in hopes of living a more holy, full, abundant life.

Where do you see habitual sin in your life? When you confess your sins to God, what do you find repeating in your life?

HOW TO PRACTICE REPENTANCE

Step 1: Pray

If you've practiced confession, this may be ready on your mind. If not, pray and invite God to show you habitual sin in your life.

Step 2: Create a plan

For whatever sin God brought to light, create a plan of next steps to help you change your behavior. What do you need to get rid of or remove from your life to make that change?

Step 3: Follow through

After you've made your plan, set a specific time that you will follow through with your plan. If it's removing something, get rid of it! If it's a group of friends that lead you to sin, change the way you spend time with them.

Step 4: Turn away from sin

After you've taken a step, take a moment to pray and commit to God to turn away from your sin...easier said than done, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, ask God to protect you from temptation to return to that way of life.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

FORGIVING OTHERS

Forgiving others is a practice where we have the opportunity to forgive like Jesus has forgiven us. In Jesus' instruction on prayer, He teaches us to ask God to forgive us in the same way we forgive others (Matt. 6:9-13). When looking through Jesus' message, forgiveness is a major component of following Him. In our lives, we often hold grudges, keep track of wrongs, or focus on sins done against us. Forgiving others encourages a life of letting go of wrongs, allowing those in our lives who have hurt us to experience grace and mercy, even when it's hard. When we forgive, we're saying to whoever sinned against us, 'You have hurt me, but I am choosing to free you of this debt.' Forgiveness combats bitterness and leads us to empathy, compassion, and freedom.

Where do you have a hard time forgiving others? What grudges do you hold? What would it be like to forgive those who hurt you?

HOW TO PRACTICE FORGIVING OTHERS

Step 1: Think through your life

What hurt or wounding are you holding onto from someone in your life? Think of an event or moment where someone has sinned against you.

Step 2: Invite God

Ask God to bring to mind moments or memories that you have a hard time letting go of. Ask Him to help you forgive.

Step 3: Remember

In what ways has God forgiven you? Where have you messed up and have needed God's forgiveness and grace? Thank Him for His perfect forgiveness.

Step 4: Offer forgiveness

As those moments come to mind, practice forgiving those who hurt you. Let go of the need for vindication or payback.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SEEK FORGIVENESS

Seeking forgiveness can be the most difficult forgiveness practice. When we know that we have hurt the ones we love, we carry guilt or a burden that feels heavy and weighs us down. Much like confession and forgiving self, this practice requires humility in admitting our mistakes and failures. It requires us to be open to God moving and bringing healing to those we hurt and to us, and it also requires truth telling and honesty. Instead of choosing vulnerability and being uncomfortable, we often choose to hide or ignore the pain we've caused others and move on. But that ends up trapping us in guilt and shame. Seeking forgiveness requires us to go to the ones we hurt, ask for forgiveness, and then let go of the shame.

Where in your life have you hurt someone and never apologized? What wounds have you caused others that you need to go back to help heal?

HOW TO PRACTICE SEEKING FORGIVENESS

Step 1: Think through your life

Have you hurt someone and never made things right? Think about moments from your life where you made mistakes and need to clean up the mess.

Step 2: Ask God

Ask God for wisdom and guidance on how to approach the person you have hurt. Ask Him to give you humility and compassion.

Step 3: Set a time

Try to plan a time where you can meet in person. Instead of a phone call or email, try to meet face-to-face.

Step 4: Ask for forgiveness

As you talk with this person, apologize and ask for forgiveness. In this conversation, try to not get defensive and ask and listen to how your hurt impacted this person.

Step 5: Pray together

If they are willing, pray together for God's continued healing, and that He would bring restoration to your relationship.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

FORGIVING SELF

Instead of forgiving self, a better way to say it might be 'receiving grace.' Sometimes we've done or said things that feel unforgivable. The truth is that we cannot forgive ourselves...if we could forgive our own sins, we wouldn't need Jesus! Thankfully, God is loving and gracious, and when we come to Him and ask for forgiveness, He's always ready. If we're honest with ourselves, there are moments from our lives that we have a hard time letting go of, whether mistakes we've made, or sins we've committed. Think of this practice less about forgiving yourself, and more about releasing and letting go of shame that holds us back and receiving God's grace for us. When the Creator of the universe has forgiven you...you're free!

What do you have in your past that you have a hard time letting go of? What would it be like to experience being forgiven 'as far as the east is from the west?'

HOW TO PRACTICE FORGIVING YOURSELF

Step 1: Think through your life

Think through your life and remember moments where you may have not forgiven yourself.

Step 2: Invite God

Ask God to speak truth into the moments you have a hard time letting go of. Ask Him to help you to release them to Him.

Step 3: Invite others

If you're willing to share with a close friend or family member, tell them where you're struggling. The courage to share with someone helps overcome shame that we carry.

Step 4: Remember

What truths about God can you remember? As you walk through your own story or shame, remember how much God loves you, and that He has forgiven you!

Step 5: Let go

Ask God for help to let go of what you're holding on to. As you begin to let go, thank God for the gift of forgiveness and freedom.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



REST

SABBATH

Sabbath is the practice of setting aside one day each week for rest and time with God. God gave Moses the ten commandments, and resting on the sabbath was important enough to make the list! With our busy lives and the barrage of media on our screens, we often fill our weekends (or non-workdays) with time for ourselves or our kids' schedules. But God invites us to spend time with Him. As we practice resting on the sabbath, we're telling God that our relationship with Him is important enough to put other things on hold. Traditionally, the Hebrew people considered Saturday the sabbath, and most Christians consider Sunday the sabbath. If you work those days, what other day during the week could you set aside? Observing the sabbath helps us trust God with things left undone, and trust that when we rest with Him, we'll actually experience abundant life.

When was the last time your family set aside a whole day to rest and seek God? What would a life with healthy rhythms of rest be like?

HOW TO PRACTICE SABBATH

Step 1: Set aside time

Plan a day where you will rest and put everything else on hold, except for engaging with God and your family or friends.

Step 2: Think it through

What practices or habits help you rest? Perhaps it's a nap, or worship music, coffee on the porch, or reading. Set aside time for those restful things.

Step 3: Follow through

When the time comes, actually do it! What can you do to prevent work/anxiety/needing to be productive from interrupting your rest?

Step 4: Find God

Where do you encounter God in your rest? What is He speaking to you? How does He show up in rest?

Step 5: Enjoy rest

Throughout your sabbath, use your practices and habits above to find and enjoy rest. Thank God for His gift of sabbath.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

SLOWING

Slowing is a practice where we intentionally take the busyness out of our lives. Between work and school and sports and life and all the other things, we barely have room for anything. With all of the hurry and haste of our schedules, we often miss much of the in-between moments as we speed from one thing to the next. As we practice slowing, several interesting things happen. We find ourselves living in the present, rather than our future schedule. We learn to enjoy a slower pace and experience freedom from rushing. We begin to notice where God is at work right now, that we might miss when we're a speedy blur. Throughout scripture we see that God is **not** in a hurry and works at His own pace. As we slow down, we get to work **with** God in what He's doing right now, being present to the people around us in love and peace.

Where in your life are you busiest? When have you experienced slowing down? Was that forced or planned?

IDEAS TO PRACTICE SLOWING

Idea 1: Drive in the slow lane

Plan a week where you'll intentionally drive the speed limit and in the slow lane. Plan to leave on time so you don't rush.

Idea 2: Eat slowly

Chew your food slowly. Savor every bite. Be the last to get up from the table. Focus on and listen to those you're eating with.

Idea 3: Speak intentionally

In conversations you have, make yourself slow down as you speak. If you're a fast-talker, try to say less, and say it slower. Make yourself listen, both to the other person as well as for what God is speaking.

Idea 4: Don't fill in the gaps

If you have several events planned throughout your day, don't try to fill in the gaps with extra tasks. Instead invite God to speak to you as you rest in the in-between.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

UNPLUGGING

Unplugging is a practice where we intentionally remove ourselves from the digital world to be present to what's happening around us. It's taking a break from our busy digital lives to engage people face to face. When we practice unplugging, we take the time to turn off notifications, emails, and texts so we can remove distractions and slow ourselves down. God made us to connect with one another, to do life together, to grieve together, to rejoice together. It's difficult to do that through an email! As we practice unplugging, we become more present to those in our lives who are hoping for a deeper connection. We become more aware of what God is doing in reality, right around us. We get to experience a more full and abundant life, free of the distractions caused by our reliance on technology.

When has technology gotten in the way of your life? How have others let technology get in the way of your relationships? What was that like?

HOW TO PRACTICE UNPLUGGING

Step 1: Invite God

Ask God to speak to you through your time unplugging. Ask Him to bring people to mind for you to connect with in person.

Step 2: Set aside time

Plan a time when you can be without technology. That may require an 'out of office' response, or letting people know ahead of time.

Step 3: Be present

As you engage with those around you, be present to the conversation. Let go of all the worry and tasks you are putting on hold. What is God speaking to you/them?

Step 4: Be intentional

Write a note or letter to someone, or make them something. When you get together in person, give it to them.

Step 5: Give thanks

Thank God for helping you make space for people in your life. Thank the person/people you are spending time with. If appropriate, give a handshake, hug, or other physical affection.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

WAITING

The practice of waiting is perhaps the simplest practice to understand. We all understand waiting...but none of us like it! Waiting, put into practice, helps us center our lives on God's timing rather than our own. Instead of forcing events to happen or forging ahead with our own agenda, waiting invites us into a life of looking to God, His timing, and when and how He makes things happen. Throughout scripture and for His people, God uses waiting as a means to refine them, change them, and make their hearts more like His. So when we practice waiting, we're becoming more aware of God's presence in the 'now' as opposed to worrying about the future, or regretting the past.

When can you remember having to wait a long time for something? If you are a parent or work with kids, why is waiting important for children to learn?

HOW TO PRACTICE WAITING

Step 1: Think through your life

Where are you waiting for things in your life? Are you being patient? Or are you trying to make things happen?

Step 2: Give it to God

Whatever it is that you're waiting for, give it to God. In your prayers, tell God that you are releasing it to Him.

Step 3: Be open

Jesus prayed 'not my will but Yours be done.' As you release what you're waiting for, listen for what God is speaking to you.

Step 4: Wait

We never really know how long this step may last. But as you wait on God to move, you are learning patience, hope, and ultimately, trust.

Step 5: Trust

As you move on, place all of your trust in God, that He will do what's best. And whenever you see Him move, thank Him for being faithful.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

HOLY LEISURE

Holy leisure is the practice of allowing ourselves to rest...and to maybe even make room for fun! The busy pace at which we live today sweeps us up in tasks, duties, and responsibilities. Holy leisure isn't shirking those, but it's making space in our schedules for our bodies and minds to rest. Much like sabbath, we're intentionally setting aside time to decompress, so that our minds and hearts are full and rested. However, where sabbath is dedicating the time spent to God, holy leisure is meant to restore us through things we enjoy. While our relationship with God won't be absent during leisure, it's more meant to drive us to a place of gratitude for what He's blessed us with than to a deeper connection with Him. Holy leisure allows us to set aside time to be with people we love and to do the things we enjoy, out of a place of thanksgiving and worship!

When was the last time you did something you truly enjoyed? What would it have been like to invite God into the middle of that?

HOW TO PRACTICE HOLY LEISURE

Step 1: Set aside time

Take a day off of work, or clear the schedule of kids' sports or hobbies. Plan a time to do something you enjoy. (If it's a family event, find something you all enjoy, or take turns!)

Step 2: Invite God

Invite God into your time of rest and leisure. God is always present, but like a good friend, He loves when we invite Him into our lives!

Step 3: Enjoy rest

Maybe for you it's reading a good book, or gardening, or eating tacos. Find what brings you rest and joy. Listen for God's kindness and encouragement during your time.

Step 4: Pray

As you wind down your time of holy leisure, pray a prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude. Thank God for bringing you peace and giving you rest.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:



TITHING

TIME

Giving time is a practice of opening up our schedules and being willing to make time for those in our lives and in our communities. Most of us live busy lives, hopping from one task to the next, without much thought about what's happening around us. When we give our time, we become present examples of Jesus at work. When we serve those in need, meet with people in our lives, or even just make space for conversation, we open the door to allow Jesus to work through us! Giving your time could look like serving at a local food bank once a month. It could look like intentionally planning time to go talk with your neighbors. It could even look like coaching a kids' sports team. The best way that we can show the love of Jesus to those around us is through spending time with others. We can't do that by ourselves!

Where do you set aside time in your life for those around you? Do you make time for people you don't know? What would that be like?

HOW TO PRACTICE GIVING YOUR TIME

Step 1: Make time

In order to give time, you have to be willing to take a break from everything you have on your schedule. Set aside some time for others.

Step 2: Pray about it

As you make time, pray and invite God to speak to you about how and where you should give your time to others. Is that serving or volunteering somewhere? Is that connecting with a neighbor or a friend?

Step 3: Do it!

Now that you've made time and prayed about it, do it! Give your time to whatever God has put on your heart. As you are serving others, you're serving Jesus! (Matthew 25:40)

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

TALENT

Giving your talent is a practice much like giving your time. If giving your time is freeing up space in your schedule to serve and be present with others, giving talent builds on that idea to incorporate ways that you are gifted. God has made each of us uniquely and given each of us different gifts. You may have a musical talent, or a way with words. You may have a green thumb or have a gifting with mechanical things. In whatever way God has uniquely made each of us, giving our talents allows us to serve those in ways they need but can't do on their own. When we look at Jesus' life, we see Him continually serving those around Him. He didn't give us these talents to lock them away for private use, or only as a way to make a living. Sharing your talents with your neighbors and others in your community allows us to share Jesus in a practical way!

What special way has God made you? What talents or hobbies do you have? Can you imagine using those to share God's love with the world?

HOW TO PRACTICE GIVING YOUR TALENT

Step 1: Pray

Spend some time asking God in what ways He has given you talent. What comes to mind?

Step 2: Look for need

What areas of your neighborhood or city could use your talent? Maybe a neighbor's yard is a mess, or maybe a single mom is having car trouble. Find a need around you that you can fill!

Step 3: Get creative

If you feel stuck, like maybe your gift is too unique or not needed, chat with a pastor at your church for ideas on how you could serve.

Step 4: Make the time

You may use your talent for work. What would it be like to take a day off of work to serve someone in need?

Step 5: Celebrate!

Take some time to thank God for giving you the talents you do have. Thank Him for allowing you to serve the world working for Him!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

TREASURE

Giving your treasure is a practice traditionally called giving your tithes and offerings. Throughout God's story in the Old and New Testament, we see God's people continually giving back to Him. Before Jesus was born, God asked the Hebrew people to bring their 'tithe to the storehouse' (Malachi 3:10). The word literally means 'tenth.' God asked His people to bring a tenth of what they had earned or been given. In the New Testament, both Jesus and His disciples regularly instruct us to bring our offerings to God as a thank you for all the ways He has blessed us. God asks us to give for two main reasons. The first, when we give back to God, we're actually freeing ourselves from greed and feelings of scarcity! Generosity leads us to freedom from an attachment to things. The second, and more important, is that giving shows God that we trust Him to care for us and provide for us, even when money is tight. It's not about how much you give, but about how freely you give!

When was the last time you felt generous? What has it been like when you've given freely, trusting God will care for you? When money is tight, do you find it easy to give? Why or why not?

HOW TO PRACTICE GIVING YOUR TREASURES

Step 1: Pray

Seriously ask God to highlight areas of your life where you need to be generous. Ask Him to reveal where you lack trust in Him.

Step 2: Pray some more

Ask God to highlight your local church, a ministry, or an organization for you to give to. What's on your heart? Where do you see a need?

Step 3: Be generous

As you give, what would it feel like to give beyond what's comfortable? It's easy to give out of abundance...it's a lot harder to give when it hurts!

Step 4: Pray even more

After you've given, thank God for the opportunity. Ask Him to help you see Him at work through your generosity. Ask him to change your heart to be more like His!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

MISSIONS

The practice of mission is when we leave our place of familiarity to serve people around the world. You may have heard of people you know going on missions trips to Mexico, India, or Africa...or some other far off place. Ever year, thousands of followers of Jesus make intentional trips to the poorest parts of our world to serve people in need. Whether it's building houses, providing food, war relief, digging wells, or a long list of other things, when we move outside of our normal circles of life we get to experience the joy of meeting the physical needs of people we don't know. We become the hands and feet of Jesus, serving people in our broken and hurting world. Jesus told us when we serve the poor, help those in need, bring healing to the sick, we're doing that to Him! The practice of going on mission forces us out of our comfort into a deeper and more trusting life with Jesus.

Have you gone on a mission trip before? What was it like? Does the idea serving somewhere far from home scare you or excite you?

HOW TO PRACTICE MISSIONS

Step 1: Pray about it

Where do you sense God inviting you? Is there a country or people group on your heart? Ask God to give you ideas or places to go.

Step 2: Find a group

Find a group or organization you can go with. Going on your own is fine, but your impact is larger when you partner with a group or organization!

Step 3: Prepare

Ask God to prepare your heart and your mind for what you will experience. As you pack, ask God to bless every item to help bring impact on your mission.

Step 4: Go!

Do it, actually go! Make sure you take a journal as a way of documenting what God is doing in you and in those you serve. When you get back, share with others, not out of a place of pride, but in a way that highlights how God is moving in you and those you serve.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is the practice of looking at your life and becoming aware of God's ownership of the things you have. God loves us so much that He continually gives us what we need and often more! When we practice stewardship, we look at our things (house, clothes, bank account, etc.) as gifts from God, rather than stuff that we've earned or worked for. And after we've developed a rhythm of stewardship, we become more and more free, more and more generous, realizing that **nothing** we have is truly ours, and **nothing** we have will go with us when we die. The more we practice stewardship, the more we realize how unnecessary and superfluous **things** are. Like the practice of giving our treasures, we become more free of worldly things as we see God's Kingdom at work. Jesus told us to not store up treasures on earth, but to store up treasure in heaven...stewardship puts that into practice!

Do you live out of simplicity or extravagance? What would it look like to share what God has given you?

HOW TO PRACTICE STEWARDSHIP

Step 1: Become aware

Take a mental inventory of your house. How much stuff do you own?

Step 2: Talk with God

Thank God for the ways He has blessed you and your family. As you think about your list, thank Him for both the big and small things.

Step 3: Think Kingdom-ly

How can you put your things to use for God's Kingdom? Where do you see need in your family, friends, or neighbors?

Step 4: Make changes

How are you living extravagantly? Ask God to show you those areas, and invite Him to help you live a simpler life.

Step 5: Choose generosity

*As you move into living a simpler life, what can you give away? What can you **not** buy and give away instead? Thank God for what He's given you, and for what you can share.*

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

How many times did you try on this practice? _____

What did you like about this practice?

What did you find difficult about this practice?

What did you find natural about this practice?

How did this practice help you move towards Jesus?

Notes:
