



Christian Devotional Practices (in no particular order)

Compiled by Luann Budd

“Inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received.

The needed change within us is God’s work, not ours...We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”

Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline.

Life-giving Devotional Practices

As you engage in these various devotional practices, note which ones are life-giving to you, and which ones are challenging? Then consider why you respond as you do. Also, notice how every practice has a corresponding freedom that it is designed to help you live into. These suggestions are not ways that we bargain with God (“since I did this, God, then you need to do this”). They don’t earn us better standing. They don’t prove we are devoted or more mature. They are simply strategies, tools, invitations to open our heart, soul, mind and strength to God’s love and the Holy Spirit’s work, and thus, to spiritual growth.

Breath Prayer—A way to center yourself in God’s presence and to be continually reminded that God is with us. Match a short prayer to the rhythm of your breathing. You can choose a verse and divide it into two parts. One part you recite as you inhale. The second part you recite as you exhale. An example from Psalm 46:10: “Be still” (inhale), “and know that I am God” (exhale). My personal favorite is from Psalm 136: “The everlasting love of God” (inhale), “lasts forever” (exhale). Spend some time inviting God to give you a verse to use as your breath prayer for this time of your life. You might also consider how is God inviting you to name him? “Emmanuel” (inhale), “You are with me” (exhale). Some have found it helpful to breathe in God’s love for them, and breathe out any resistance to His love. As you practice praying in this way throughout the day, you’ll find that this prayer will become like a catchy chorus that you find yourself singing.

Study—Use your Bible study tools to delve into a passage of Scripture and learn all about the historical context, the various words, and figures of speech. Notice what challenges you. What comforts you? Once you’ve thoroughly studied the passage, spend time praying with it. (Romans 12:2) Linger longer. What is God revealing to you? Use your journal to make a record of the insights you are learning and reflect on how they are transforming how you view yourself, the Lord, and the world.

Scripture Meditation (Lectio Divina, or Sacred Reading or Bible intake) Take any passage of Scripture and slowly read it aloud a few times, listening for a word or phrase that catches your attention and invites you to linger with it in prayer. How does this particular word or phrase connect with your life? How does it comfort or confront you? Talk with God about your response to the word, your thoughts and feelings that

arise around the phrase. Then listen for God's invitation to you. Finish with a time of silence, resting in God's presence.

For further reading, see *Sacred Reading, The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Michael Casey; *Shaped by the Word, The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.; *Eat This Book, A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* by Eugene Peterson.

Solitude—spend time alone, being very mindful that the Lord is present with you. In truth, we are never alone. The goal is to develop an inner attentiveness to the Lord who is always with us. “Be still and know that I am God.”

Silence — spend several hours not speaking. Part of the value of practicing periods of silence is to help us discern when it is appropriate for us to speak, and when it is best for us to refrain. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.” We are gaining control of our tongue and learning to listen.

Journaling (Writing something down)—Simply write your thoughts. It may be helpful to ask yourself a question, and then see what you discover as you write your answer. Or see what connections you make as you reflect on what you are reading. You might journal your response to a word or phrase (“surrender” or “Good Shepherd”). Or ask yourself a question that is asked of people in the Scripture (“What do you want?” John 1:37) or ask the Lord a question as someone asked of Him (“How can it be since I’m...” [fill in the blank with whatever you think is going to make it impossible for God to do what he says he’s going to do in you and for you and through you]). Journaling helps you to track your journey of seeking the Lord.

For further reading, see *Journal Keeping, Writing for Spiritual Growth* by Luann Budd; *How to Keep a Spiritual Journal* (revised) by Ron Klug; *Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive Writing* by Helen Cepero.

Community—Who are your sacred companions on the spiritual journey? Give God thanks for the gift of community and for the way you have been shaped, encouraged, and challenged (even provoked) by others. Then spend time listening to God. How can you pray for these fellow travelers? If you have struggled to find a community, offer your longings, fears, or hurts to God in prayer. Ask God to guide you toward someone, or a small group, who can walk with you.

For further reading, see *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* by David Benner; *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* by Henri Nouwen; *Sensible Shoes Series* by Sharon Garlough Brown for a fictitious look at four women who become spiritual companions.

Rest—Many of us have spent years pouring ourselves into the work of ministry, even being overly responsible, perhaps hiding behind our busyness, thriving on being needed, and finding our personal worth too interwoven with our work. Spend some time resting. Truly stop all work and lay down all responsibilities. Find ways to practice delighting in God and celebrating his love when you are not doing anything other than being with him. Give yourself permission to play or be creative. “Waste” a day with him. If you feel tired, give yourself permission to take a nap. Go to bed early and sleep until you wake up without an alarm. Let your physical body enjoy being able to rest while your mind takes a rest from work. Lay down the everlasting burden of needing to manage and care for others. Unplug. Rest.

Gratitude—Contemplate the ways that God has provided for you through the kindness of others, even strangers. Prayerfully review the last day or week. How has God provided for you? Someone has said that

God comes to us disguised as our life. Has God worn any unexpected disguises? Offer God thanks for his care and the gifts he has brought to you.

Truth-Telling and Confession—Name what is true, even if it doesn't sound very nice. How honest and unedited are you in your prayers? If you were convinced God would not punish you for being candid about your thoughts and feelings, what would you pray? Spend time writing the words then ask for the courage to pray the words. You might also take the exercise one step further by identifying a trusted companion and confessing your honest thoughts, feelings, fears, struggles, or sin, aloud.

Lament—Feel the sadness and loss of broken dreams as you name the things that have died: your plans, ambitions, health, work, ministry, hopes for what life would be like. "These spiritual and emotional deaths are no less significant than the physical ones, but they can be harder to name." You may have some grieving to do. You may recognize that the Holy Spirit is trying to catch your attention by pressing on some wounded places, so name your sorrow in prayer. Have any wounds of sorrow become infected with self-pity, bitterness or resentment? Write a prayer of lament, offering God your honest thoughts, feelings, pain, and disappointment.

Prayer of Examen (Review your day)—Begin by quieting yourself in the presence of God, giving God thanks for some of the gifts of the day. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice and name your movement toward God and away from God. Prayerfully review your day with God (perhaps going back hour by hour), noticing and naming the moments when you were aware of the presence of God and the moments when God seemed hidden. Were there moments when you responded with faith or moments when you were overcome by fear? Celebrate God's goodness to you. Are there words that were spoken that you want to hold on to, and some that you'd like to release? Confess what needs to be confessed and receive God's grace and forgiveness. In light of what you've noticed in your prayerful review of the day, how might you live tomorrow differently?

Praying with Imagination—Read aloud a narrative passage of Scripture several times (for example, Luke 1:26-38). Now imagine yourself in the story. For example, imagine you are Mary when the angel Gabriel appears. What do you see? Hear? Feel? Think? How do you respond to the angel's message? What does your response reveal about where you are with God? Dialogue with God about what you notice.

For further reading, see *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster.

Celebration—Ponder what it means to be chosen, accepted, loved, forgiven and treasured by Jesus. Find a way to celebrate the Spirit's work in making you a dwelling place for the Most High God. Throw a party. Be extravagantly generous. Sometimes feasting is more challenging for us than fasting. So pull out all of the stops and Celebrate! Buy yourself a bouquet of fresh flowers to enjoy.

Personalize a Verse—The words of good news that the Scriptures proclaim are throughout the Old and New Testament. Practice inserting your name into a revelation we are given of the character of God. Then come back to the truth several times throughout the day. For example, the Lord tells us that he is always with us, so we might personalize this truth: "Do not be afraid, [name], for I am with you."

Intercessory Prayer—Spend time in prayer just listening. Who is God bringing to mind? Think beyond your usual list of needs and ask the Lord to help you pray with his heart and compassion, confident that he hears both your words and your silence. You may want to open your hand and lift it to the Lord as each one comes to mind.

Submission (Learning to not always need to get our own way). Submission involves learning to lay an issue down and leave it there, to drop the matter, to give in and not let our desire to have our way control us. Where are you in a tug-of-war for control? Can you simply surrender, valuing the other person's desires and plans by giving up your own? "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34) This is not about groveling, self-hatred, or rejection of our individuality, but simply living into the reality that we do not always have to get what we want. Where can you hold someone else's interests above our own and be liberated from the tyranny of self-indulgence? Reflect on ways that you can submit to God, the Scriptures, our family, neighbors, others in our church, the poor and outcast, the secular government. (Please note: We should never submit to what is destructive: abuse, manipulation, extortion, etc.)

Forgiveness—Does your conscience bring to mind something that you did (or chose not to do)? Ask God to bring to mind anyone that you may have wounded. If you have the opportunity, humble yourself and ask them to forgive you. And if you resist wanting to ask them to forgive you, ask the Lord to reveal to you the reason why. Pray for the courage to practice humility and take intentional baby steps toward being more vulnerable.

Play (Holy Leisure)—Remember how you enjoyed playing as a child. Do you enjoy playing now? What would bring you joy? Make it happen either by yourself or with others.

For further reading, see *Leisure and Spirituality: Biblical, History and Contemporary Perspectives* by Paul Heintzman.

Waiting—God often has us in the waiting room of life, and it's hard. If you find yourself impatient, intentionally put yourself in situations where you must wait...get in the longest line at the store and resist the temptation to get on your phone, drive in the slow lane all the way to work. Use the time you are waiting to be attentive to the presence of God. What would God want you to notice about the people around you? How might you pray for them? Practice being prayerful while you wait. Keep a record of what you notice about your waiting.

Worship—What leads you into the presence of God and invites you to get lost in worshipping him? Perhaps it is contemplating the wonders of a tiny wildflower, or trying to fathom outer space. Perhaps it is a song that expresses your heart. Perhaps it is through a creative expression of art or a particular author that writes in a way that resonates with you. Spend time intentionally doing those things that lead you into worship and then worship the Lord for an hour or two, not because you must but because you may.

Written Prayers—Copy prayers from the lyrics of favorite songs (many hymns are especially well-suited for prayer. Try writing out your own prayers. Use the Psalms to create your own prayer. Model a prayer after Daniel's prayer, or Nehemiah's prayer. Use the *Common Book of Prayer* and copy various types of prayers that resonate with your heart. What do you notice about using the words of others in prayer?

Guidance (spiritual discernment)—The Lord will guide you always (not sometimes, but ALWAYS) is the promise from Isaiah 58:11. How do you receive guidance from God? For years, Christians have looked for the convergence of three lights to help us receive guidance from the Holy Spirit: The Scripture, our spiritual friends, and our experience. How has God revealed his way to you in the past? Record the insights you receive as you are seeking his guidance today. Copy Proverbs 2 and put your name in it.

For further reading, see *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard.

Contemplative Prayer (centering prayer)—pray without words by just prayerfully sitting in silence, gazing on the beauty of the Lord, “resting in God’s love and presence.” (Psalm 131) Because our minds can be like jumping monkeys, it can be hard to settle into silence. We may be in a very quiet place, but inside ourselves, we are full of words and noise. Sometimes it is helpful to have a single word or a verse of Scripture that we use to call us back to gazing on our Beloved. The goal of centering prayer is to intimately commune with our One and Only, Jesus, the Lover of our soul. We do not need to use words to express our devotion to God...he knows our heart. If you are new to this type of prayer, set your alarm for 5 minutes and then practice praying without words. You could also develop a playlist with a favorite worship song or two that leads you into 5-15 minutes of silence, and then after the period of silence, and final song plays. What do you notice as you pray this way?

Writing your Story—spend time writing your own journey with the Lord, the times when you were passionately pursuing him and the times when you turned your back. Reflect on your longings and fears, your surrender and resistance, how you are moving deeper into the knowledge of God, and deeper into the knowledge of yourself.

For further reading, *The Gift of Being Yourself* by David Benner; *Never Ever Be the Same* and *Pure Hearted* by Kathy Collard Miller

Generosity—Sometimes we think that we need to be frugal in all aspects of our lives, yet the Scripture invites us to be generous with all of our resources (time, financial resources, service). Practice giving gifts to others this week. Consider how you might generously provide for someone else’s needs anonymously. Prayerfully consider what would be a meaningful expression of love and offer it wholeheartedly.

Serving—How might you serve others this week? Explore how you might serve strangers, too. Perhaps you can volunteer with others to serve those in your community. Plan how you will practice serving in the name of the Lord Jesus. You may want to serve in secret so that you do not get public credit for your service.

Fasting—Privately, or as part of a group, abstain from food (but drink water) for spiritual purposes. It is not a practice to try to earn God’s favor in order to get God to do what you want. It is about drawing us closer to him as we acknowledge that he is our true Bread and that his Word is our true food. We are dependent upon him for everything.

Simplicity (Purity of Heart)—Reflect on the complexities of being immersed in a consumer culture and the various ways you are pulled to conform. How might you simplify an area of your life? Make a plan to declutter and detach yourself from your stuff. Give away some of your possessions. Do you notice that you are clutching to something? Addicted? Compulsive? The goal is to be set free so that we might truly be free share with others. Do you discern an invitation from the Lord to trust him to provide for you?

Rule of Life—Finish this statement: This is how I live my life.... Get specific enough to develop your plan (rule) for how you desire to live, including your daily routines, your values, your annual calendar. Start with one simple statement, and gradually add to it.

For further reading, see *Crafting a Rule of Life* by Stephen Macchia.

Spiritual Direction—Do you long to learn how to see God in your daily life? Spiritual direction provides an opportunity to come into the presence of God with someone trained in the ministry of holy listening,

someone who helps us notice and name how God is at work in our lives, with the goal of deepening friendship with God and greater attentiveness to the movement of the Holy Spirit. If you do not yet have a spiritual director, take the first step this week by exploring spiritual direction opportunities in your local community. Talk with your pastor, contact a retreat center, or look at an online resource such as the Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (ESDA) for a regional directory.

As we use these various devotional practices, Jesus Christ has promised to be our ever-present Teacher and Guide. His voice is not hard to hear. His guidance is not hard to understand. So open yourself to him. Not everything will be life-giving for you and that's okay. As my mentor used to say, "Pray as you can, not as you can't." I found that as I practiced these ancient ways of experiencing the Lord, he caused the truths I had learned to move from my head into my heart. What seemed like a waste of time initially became easier and more intuitive with practice, some even became my favorite ways of being with him. Always we have this promise: Jesus will lead us in the everlasting way.

Q & A

What's the purpose of engaging in these devotional practices?

Engaging in Christian devotional practices is for the expressed purpose of welcoming (rather than resisting) the Spirit's work. For me, these exercises help me to foster my relationship with the Lord. They have been essential in helping me know deep within my soul the extravagant, boundless love of Jesus...specifically for me...and to increase in my love for him in response. By engaging in these practices I have become aware of Jesus being with me always and I see his active work in my everyday life. Not only does his presence fill the universe, I know he is with me, and that is such a gift! I have experienced how deepening my comprehension of his love through the use of these exercises frees me to see my own shortcomings, and I have grown in being able to choose to respond differently. Bottom line, these practices help us to actively engage with the Holy Spirit and become the kind of soil that produces fruit.

What is Spiritual Formation?

The Apostle Paul speaks of spiritual formation as a process of Christ being formed in us. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is furious that those who trusted in Jesus are going back to their traditional Jewish lifestyle and mistaken theology, keeping the rules the rabbis came up with and trusting in their own human efforts to gain the acceptance of God. Paul says that they have abandoned the gospel of grace when they return to their Jewish traditions. He writes as if he were their mother in the throes of childbirth, laboring until Christ is formed in them. "My dear children, for whom *I am again* in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19). We learn from Paul that Christian spiritual formation is the process of Christ being formed in us, but the means is not that we learn to keep a bunch of rules or treat our bodies harshly (Col 2). We also learn that it is not a straight climb up to maturity but rather it is often a messy path with setbacks and missteps. And finally, we learn that we can assist others, but when we are helping others in the process it can be painful—painful like childbirth.

Paul gives us another glimpse into the miraculous process of transformation when he writes to the Roman church. He calls spiritual formation a metamorphosis¹—his says we are being "transformed" (*metamorphosis*.) It's not a tiny change but a totally radical one.

Transformation in the insect world (as in our spiritual life) begins with death—the organism's cells are actually digested into a kind of biological soup and then those resources are recycled to become the pathway to a whole new, different kind of life...the caterpillar's tissues have to be broken down because they won't work for the butterfly and then those resources are used to form new organs. That's what's going on in the cocoon. When the butterfly emerges, it is a truly new creature with a new heart, new brain structure, new antennae, new eyes, new connections between the brain, eyes and antennae; new legs, and new digestive system that nourishes the butterfly on nectar instead of leaves. This process is not a minor mutation but a massive, major renovation of every aspect of the

¹ Watch this 4 min [video](#) trailer or rent this movie to ponder the mystery involved in a caterpillar's transformation of its physical body and consider the similarities to the spiritual life.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=AZk6nZGH9Xo

creature, changing it from a plant-eating bug that crawls on its belly from leaf to leaf, to a beautiful Monarch soaring across the United States.

The caterpillar's transformation is miraculous and mysterious and is a picture for us into the revolutionary changes that take place during the spiritual process of our spiritual transformation. It is revolutionary in every way. Paul says it is as radical as dying and being recreated and given a new life: "We were buried with him (Jesus Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:4) We die and are raised to live a new life. Mysterious. Miraculous. Transformative.

What role does grace play in the process?

We all agree that when we believe in Jesus, he gives us his Spirit and incredibly, we become sons and daughters of God. It is all a gift, an unearned, unmerited gift. We die to our old self and are raised to live a new life, not because of anything that we do, but because we believe and put our faith in Jesus. "By grace thru faith," we begin our new life (Ephesians 2:8-10). And by grace through faith, the character and love and mind of Christ is formed in us. As we recognize our own shortcomings, we come before the throne of grace to receive mercy and find help. The journey of spiritual formation is all of grace.

If the process is all of grace, are we supposed to be working at it?

I have had significant debates with friends who were adamant that because the process is all of grace, we should not make any effort to try to become more like Christ. Our part, they said, was just to let the Spirit do his work.

But Paul and Peter tell us to make every effort to become like Jesus. When Paul writes to Timothy to "be diligent in these matters" [setting an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity, devoting himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching to teaching" to fully using his gift, he exhorts Timothy to "give yourself wholly to them, so that *everyone may see your progress*. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (I Tim. 4)] It seems that Paul is telling Timothy that he has a role to play in his maturing process.

Love and obedience don't just happen. We are called to enter into the process of working with the Holy Spirit in becoming mature Christians. It's a lifelong journey, for sure. We often take two steps forward and then three steps back, we get side-tracked, we give up. We make progress as God's love expands within us, and we regress as we slip into self-righteousness and putting ourselves first. We make progress as we are drawn into an experience of love and wholehearted devotion to the Lord, and we regress as we slip into viewing our relationship with God as being a burden, a duty, an obligation. Even though we can't make ourselves mature, we do have a part to play as we seek to follow (or resist) the Spirit.

Our part, according to Jesus' parable, is to be "good soil" – to stay engaged and not get "weeded out" (Luke 8). Our part is to "hear, retain and persevere in doing" what we are taught. We are commanded to grow in our love for the Lord and for others. We are called to seek the Lord, to surrender our lives (Romans 12), to open every nook and cranny to the light, to listen, to receive, to obey. Our part, simply put, is to make every effort to stay engaged in our relationship with the Lord and open our

interior life so that the Spirit can grow us up....until Christ is formed in us. These devotional exercises are intended to help us do just that.

For more information about how these practices can be integrated into our lives, see the *Sensible Shoes* Series by Sharon Garlough Brown. Many of the descriptions above are from the second book in the series, *Two Steps Forward: A Story of Persevering in Hope* (used with permission of InterVarsity Press). See also [InterVarsity Press](#), especially the books published in their [Formatio](#) group.

Network of Evangelical Women in Ministry | 10004 Cork Oak Circle, Oakdale, CA 95361 | www.newim.org

©2018 by Luann Budd

All rights reserved. No part of this handout may be reproduced in any form without written permission from NEWIM. If you want to make copies for use in your church, please email us at info@newim.org to let us know.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing house. All rights reserved.

