

Spiritual practices at Living Faith Church
Lent 2024

Spiritual Practices at Living Faith Church Greensborough

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Spiritual practices

1. Some background

We believe it is God's desire that all of his beloved children know how firmly they are held in the loving, healing and transforming presence of God. God is good, all the time. We can trust God. We are safe with God. God fills our desire to belong.

"God is our homeland. And the homing instinct of the human being is homed on God. As St. Augustine put it, "we must fly to our beloved homeland. There the Father is, and there is everything."¹



"God is the ground of our being, the relationship between creature and Creator is such that, by sheer grace, separation is not possible. God does not know how to be absent. The illusion of separation is generated by the mind and is sustained by the riveting of our attention to the interior soap opera, the constant chatter of the cocktail party going on in our heads. For most of us, this is what *normal* is."²

"Silence is God's first language.
Everything else is just a poor translation.
In order to understand this language,
we must learn to be silent and to rest in God."³

¹ Martin Laird, *Into the silent Land* (2006), page 2

² *Into the silent Land*, page 15.

³ Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love* (1992), page 105.

We want to mature
in our faith and
grow closer to God –
deeper into God’s
presence, closer to God’s
heart
and deeper into our
awareness of the divine
within
and around us.



The traditions of our Christian faith know of many spiritual practices. Millions of faithful followers of Christ have sought out these practices, tell us of their unique ways of inviting transformation and healing into our hearts. When we now take our steps towards open ourselves to God’s presence and work, we do so in respect of the all those who have come before us, and whose wise loving counsel helps us now.

**Lent is a sacred time
that offers us opportunities
to attend to our
spiritual needs.**

Each of us start this spiritual journey from wherever we are, and each path will be different. With God’s help, we will discover how each of us can best make room for stillness and awareness.



2. Spiritual practices – What's that? And why do it?

Almost all of us almost always have a clear sense of who we are and what's going on inside us and around us.

**We are who we are.
We know who we are.
Or do we?**

Why should we need to be transformed? Why should we *want* to be transformed? Into what – optimised versions of our current selves?



What are some of these spiritual practices?



“There are two contemplative practices of fundamental importance in the Christian tradition: the practice of **stillness** (also called meditation, still prayer, contemplative prayer etc.) and the practice of watchfulness or **awareness**.”⁴

⁴ *Into the silent Land*, page 4

Be still and know that I am God

(Psalm 46:10)

Lectio divina means “divine/godly reading”. This is a reflective or contemplative way to read short passages from the Bible and allow God, through these Biblical words, to bring something to our awareness.

Centering Prayer is a very simple and easy-to-do way to let go of all our busy thoughts and instead consent to the presence and work of God within us.

Welcoming Practice is a short prayer-like response to anything to we experience. The Welcoming Practice helps us to make trustful “letting go” a habit.

Fasting is one of the most universally practiced faith expressions. Mostly, fasting has to do with reducing or abstaining from (certain) foods or drinks. However, we can also fast from habits, behaviours and “things that we do” in order to make room for God’s presence in our daily life.

Rest is a basic practice of renewal and celebration. God the Creator rests. Jesus rests. Creation rests. And we, too, need to rest.

Chanting is another near-universal practice of the spiritual life. Chanting brings the words of Scripture, the breath of life and our bodies together. In Christian practise, chanting is not about seeking some out-of-body experience – the opposite is true! We ground ourselves right in our very body!



Are these spiritual practices even Christian?

The spiritual practices that we will learn are **modelled in the Bible**⁵. In doing so, we learn more and more to abide in Christ (John 15:1-11) and become one (John 17:21-23b).

These spiritual practices are **affirmed by Scripture**. For example, in Psalm 145, David promises:

On the glorious splendour
of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works,
I will meditate.

2 Tim 3:16-17 tells us that “all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

Our practices mirror the
examples of Jesus, and
of other characters in our
faith history.

We follow Jesus’s invitation to “come away and rest for a while” (Mark 6:31). We imitate Christ when we “pray alone” (Luke 9:18) to open ourselves to the work of God within us (Luke 22:39-46).



⁵ A more detailed summary can be found here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-are-spiritual-disciplines>



Spiritual practices are not “plug-ins” from other faiths that Christians borrow to join into the 21st century zeitgeist interest in spirituality. The spiritual practices we learn about here are millennia old **acts of Christian surrender** that come to us through the faithful testimony of spiritual practitioners like Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, countless nuns and monks of different contemplative orders, or more recently Thérèse de Lisieux, Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Henri Nouwen, Ruth Hailey Barton or Richard Rohr.

Spiritual practices are **always means, never ends**. Praying or Scripture meditation, for example, are *not* transformation. They are not our faith in God. We meditate on Bible passages or pray in order to make room for God to do the sacred work of transformation.

Over time, spiritual practices will become more and more a way of being – a life lived in compassionate awareness, self-giving love and unceasing prayerfulness (1 Thess 5:17).

**Spiritual
growth and
maturity are
God’s work,
not ours.**



Think of a gardener: she does not actually *grow* any plant, but she prepares the conditions for a plant’s healthy growth.

Why a group for spiritual practices? Why not just do it by myself?

We will often engage in spiritual practices when we are by ourselves.

However, almost all spiritual practices are also practised together with others – singing/chanting, many forms of praying, and Bible meditations are great ways to practise devotion in a group.

For once, it is easier to learn new practices in a group. We learn from one another and with one another.

But more importantly, we learn and practice together so that we can be **witnesses** of one another's steps of faith, devotion and trust.

Spiritual practices
are exercises of trust.
We model our trust
in God by trusting
one another.



By practicing together, our practices become acts of devotion that our Living Faith Church-version of **The Body of Christ** engages in.

Why not just keep thinking and studying the Bible?

Bible study is a major part of our faith practice. That's why our Life Groups are so important to us! But we cannot think our way into God's presence. But wait – there is more!

We want to everyone to come closer to God. This involves changes that are not about will-power, behaviour change or character optimisation.



Transformation is
God's work of grace
within us.

God guides us,
with our consent,
into oneness with
God-self.

God's voice is gentle. Our own thinking can be pretty noisy! Even In Bible study, our own thoughts can drown out God's whispers. We're such busy thinkers!

"I think, therefore I am! Whatever I think, that's got to be the real truth! Surely, I'm not wrong about this?! I think that my thinking is pretty reliable. So I'd better keep paying close attention to what's going on in my head! That should do the trick"



Our culture encourages us to rely on our own thinking, and to assume that our thinking brains are the best possible guides – and the best possible way to connect with God!

In reality, our own thinking centers mostly on ourselves. We spend a lot of time busily lost in thought - daydreaming or worrying, reminiscing or ruminating, planning or analysing ourselves and those around us. That's a sure way to stay unaware of the gentle whispers of God's guidance and promises!

Our Christian spiritual traditions teach that beyond our self-centred thinking, there is a deep spiritual awareness that awaits discovery.

All that is required of us is to say Yes to this journey of discovery.



Spiritual practices help us to notice our desire for God and our trust in God.

“You have made us for yourself,
O Lord,
and our heart is restless
until it rests in You.”⁶

⁶ At. Augustine, Confessions 1, 1, 1.

It is my prayer that God will call you closer
to the divine heart of love.
May God guide your response to this sacred call,
and may you notice in yourself
your God-given longing
to be brought closer and closer to God.
May we learn together to abide in Christ.



Ellen Grabner, February 2024

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