

Soul Care / Spiritual Formation Two-Day Retreat



***Contributors:
Jim Lee, Jo Newell, Janine Young***



Spiritual Formation / Soul Care Retreat A Two-Day Retreat

Day One

- 9:00 am Welcome, and Orientation, and Plan for Our Time Together
(with coffee/pastries)
- 9:30 am Our Essential Nature (Body and Soul)
- 10:00 am Living Godspeed (<https://www.livegodspeed.org/home>, 36 minutes)
(with processing questions)
- 11:15 am Soul Care vs. Soul Neglect
(Read out loud together)
- 11:45 am Break
- 12:00 pm Triad/Pair Processing Time #1
- 12:45 pm Lunch
- 2:00 pm Practicing the Presence of God ... The Daily Examen
(short teaching followed by hands-on experience)
- 3:00 pm A Way of Listening to God with Scripture: Lectio Divina
(short teaching followed by hands-on experience)
- 4:00 pm A Prayer Walk
- 5:00 pm Whole Group Processing Time

Day Two

- 9:00 am Proverb of the Day of the Month (Proverbs 16 or other):
(What is the Lord saying to you in this passage?)
- 10:00 am Gratitude
(with experiential and processing time)
- 11:15 am Break
- 11:30 am Triad/Processing Time #2
- 12:00 pm Lunch
- 1:00 pm Jesus-Focused Centering Prayer
a.k.a. Breath Prayer or Prayer of the Heart
(short teaching, followed by experience, and reflection questions)
- 2:00 pm 2-Hours Extended Time Alone with God (ETAWG)

The Essential Nature of People – Body and Soul/Spirit

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26, ESV)

“What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?” (Matthew 16:26, MSG)

"Our souls are of such fundamental importance, truly the only thing besides our physical bodies that we are entirely, independently responsible to steward...both body and soul require more tenderness and attentiveness than I had imagined...Our souls are what allow us to connect--with God, with other people, with nature, with art. Without a soul you can walk, drive, and sleep, but you can't love, you can't weep, you can't feel...And so, Jesus' question--what does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose their soul?--is a way of demonstrating the paradox of getting everything you want, only to find yourself unable to experience those things you've worked so hard for. All those things you want out there? Art and food and connection and beauty and experiences and meaning? You cannot feel or taste or touch those things without a soul. And so what good are they to you, if you gain them at the expense of the softest, most precious part of you?...What kills a soul? Exhaustion, secret keeping, image management. And what brings a soul back from the dead? Honesty, connection, grace." (Present Over Perfect, Shauna Nyquist)

- Some Definitions

- The soul is the immaterial part of a person (*Systematic Theology*, Grudem)
- The human soul is the part of a person that is not physical. It is the part of every human being that lasts eternally after the body experiences death (gotquestions.org).
- “You don’t have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body.” (George McDonald)
- The soul of a human being can be compared to a mechanical clock (needs regular maintenance, runs because of intricate sets of gears and wheels, complex and interconnected, etc.). The soul is that part of a person that lies behind the face at the mechanism’s core. The soul integrates all the parts of a person’s life – the people, places, events, thoughts, and feelings. The soul is the center of who we are, past, present, and future. Our soul holds our hopes, longings, and desires, our passions, gifts, and individuality (*Embracing Soul Care: Making Space for What Matter Most*, Smith).

- Four Views

- Conditional Unity: a unified mixture of material and immaterial (“both/and”, an evangelical perspective, more on that in *Christian Theology* [Erikson, Ch. 23])
- Dichotomy: belief that a person is made of two parts (body and soul/spirit, also an evangelical perspective)

- Monism: belief that a person is of one element (the body only, not adopted by evangelical theologians since so many Bible verses talk about soul and spirit living on after our bodies die)
- Trichotomy: belief that a person is made of three parts: body, soul, and spirit (also an evangelical perspective)
- Some Reasons why Dichotomy seems to be potentially the better viewpoint (from *Systematic Theology* [Ch. 23])
 1. Scripture uses “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably
 - a. In John 12:27, Jesus says “Now is My soul troubled.” And in John 13:21, John says about Jesus: “troubled in His Spirit.”
 - b. See also variations in soul (Luke 1:46-47, Rev. 6:9 and 20:4) and spirit (Hebrews 12:23 and I Peter 3:19)
 2. At death, Scripture says either that the “soul” departs or the “spirit” departs (Genesis 35:18, I Kings 17:21, Isaiah 53:12, Luke 12:20, Luke 23:46, Ecclesiastes 12:7, John 19:30, Acts 7:59)
 3. Man is said to be either “body and soul” or “body and spirit” (Matthew 10:28, I Corinthians 5:5, James 2:26, I Corinthians 7:34, II Corinthians 7:1, etc.)
 4. The “soul” can sin, or the “spirit” can sin

Note: Those who hold to trichotomy will usually agree that the “soul” can sin since they think that the soul includes the intellect, the emotions, and the will; however, generally think of the “spirit” as purer than the soul, and when renewed, as free from sin and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This trichotomist understanding (which sometimes finds its way into popular Christian preaching and writing) is not really supported fully by Scripture.
 5. Everything that the soul is said to do, the spirit is also said to do, and everything that the spirit is said to do the soul is also said to do; therefore, those who advocate trichotomy face a difficult problem defining clearly just what the difference is between the soul and the spirit (from their perspective)

But, if we disagree from an evangelical perspective, we can and should disagree agreeably realizing that only God Himself has the complete understanding as our Creator! But it is good to have your own Biblically informed perspective in God’s grace and truth!

References: *Systematic Theology* (Grudem), *Christian Theology* (Erikson), *Embracing Soul Care* (Smith)

Godspeed: The Pace of Being Known

<https://www.livegodspeed.org/home>, 36 minutes

What lessons did Matt learn from his experiences? How was he different after his years in Scotland?

What thoughts or people from the video particularly caught your attention? What about them interested you?

How do the ideas from this video connect with your life? What change(s) might God be calling you to consider?

Soul Health

You can't be fruitful if you neglect the Source.

By Mindy Caliguire

Yesterday, I stood in front of a ministry team and asked: "What tends to emerge in the life of a person who neglects his or her soul? What symptoms creep in?"

I explained that no one ever sets out to trash the condition of his soul, and particularly not those of us in vocational ministry. Yet we often find ourselves in a spiritual death spiral-facing ever increasing ministry loads yielding ever diminishing returns. But we march dutifully onward, assuming that our spiritual state, a neglected soul, is somehow part of the "deal" in a life devoted to ministry.

So, I asked, what are the signs of soul neglect? At first the room was silent. Then somebody ventured, "Anxiety," and I knew they got it (not every group does). Once started, their answers came so fast I couldn't write them on the flip chart fast enough.

"Self-absorption," they called out. "Shame," "apathy," "toxic anger," "chronic fatigue," "lack of confidence," "isolation," "sin looks more appealing," "no compassion," "self-oriented," "drivenness," "loss of vision," and "no desire for God." Soon every inch of the page was crammed.

A sad feeling hovered over the room as these leaders, "weary in well doing," saw themselves in the mirror.

Then, with much relief, we turned the page, and I asked: "What emerges in your life when you're deeply connected with God, when your soul is healthy?"

This page also filled up quickly: "love," "joy," "compassion," "giving and receiving grace," "generosity of spirit," "peace," (at this point, some bright bulb usually suggests the entire list of the fruit of the spirit!) "ability to trust," "discernment."

Heads nod in acknowledgement as individuals recall times when this was their experience, too. "Boundlessness," "work coming out of the overflow of my life with God," "creativity," "vision," "balance," "focus." All in all, a pretty desirable list.

Then I bring it to a vote. Holding up the Soul Neglect list, I ask, "Who votes for this?" Everyone laughs! No one in their right mind would choose to live this way. Then I call their bluff. "The truth is, you vote for one or the other of these two lists every minute of every day." Ouch.

The truth is, even as Christian leaders, we can neglect the care of our own souls in our attempt to care for the souls of others.

In a redemptive relationship with God through Christ, the soul is said to be "saved," and rightly so. Positionally, it has been brought from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from death to life

But beyond a soul's "position," something else is true about souls. They are living. Like all living things, our souls can thrive or shrivel. Every soul, even if redeemed, has a quality of life, a degree of health. How do we assess that degree of health, and how is it improved?

In the realm of physical health, if we care for our bodies, they tend toward health. If not, they don't. To assess physical health, we rely on measures like blood pressure, pulse, cholesterol, and the like.

There are also indicators of soul health. And for many in leadership these days, the results aren't good. The soul is susceptible to neglect. Why? Well, here's a profound thought to impress your friends with; souls are deep.

What exactly does that mean? In *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard explains the depth of souls in two senses. In one sense, the soul is deep because it's below the level of our conscious awareness.

For example, your soul will not directly rise up within you after a conflict and say, "Hey, that's me driving your reaction here!" The soul does not register formal dissent when you mistreat your body; it will not announce itself wounded when harsh words are spoken to you. It stays well below the surface of your conscious life. It is, indeed, deep. There are many symptoms of soul health, but we often miss them because the soul evades observation.

The soul is also deep in the sense that it is foundational to who you are. In the end, everything about your life, your personhood, is in some way a function of your soul. Willard writes, "Fundamental aspects of life such as art, sleep, sex, ritual, family ('roots'), parenting, community, health, and meaningful work are all in fact soul functions, and they fail and fall apart to the degree that soul diminishes." Your soul's health is the driving force behind everything that matters to you.

So, what makes a soul healthy? Quite simply, a soul is healthy to the extent that it experiences a strong connection to and receptivity to God. Under those conditions, the soul is most alive, most receptive to divine breathings, divine promptings, divine power in the face of joy or pain or opposition. Connection and receptivity. A rather simple spiritual concept, really.

Jesus' warning was clear: "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15: 5, TNIV). However, I find that connecting this spiritual reality to how we actually live is another matter.

Personally, I've known what it means to fail in this area. I crashed through every symptom of soul neglect when working with a team to launch a new church near Boston. Eventually my soul demanded to be heard. I was attempting to bear fruit, to do everything in my own strength. Finally, I heard the gentle voice of the shepherd ask, "Mindy, what part of 'nothing' (in John 15:5) don't you understand?"

My soul's recovery was a slow one. Thankfully, I had a few soul-guides (in person and on pages) that led me into a new way of life that, while still a work in process, keeps me much more clear on my need for authentic connection to God, more than anything else in my life. So, my role at Willow Creek now is to highlight our intense conviction about the centrality of the soul, and then, as a corollary, the urgency to find a way of life that keeps the soul healthy. Details of how are always less important than those two points, but they matter as well.

The "how" of soul health is all about cultivating connection and receptivity to God, and that generally takes the form of spiritual practices that open the human soul to God. Woven together, these practices become a way of life that keeps the soul healthy. But living this way does require a fundamental shift in the psyche, not just a better plan to be more organized or more "spiritual." The shift is to believe that precisely in this depth of connection with God is where life and fruit-bearing are to be found. Live without that kind of connection, and you're kidding yourself.

Sitting in the atrium across from Scott over lunch, he asked, "Mindy, I want to believe what you're saying, and to live that way without having to go through the pain. But is that really possible? I can't seem to get there on my own." He knows his inclinations well. All I could say was, "I hope so ..." I wouldn't wish that pain on anyone. Yet, the decision is his to make. Every minute, every hour, every day.

Most Christian leaders would agree that certain practices help us "grow" or attain spiritual health. Prayer and Bible study make the top of almost any list. But given the current symptoms it would appear that more is needed, either in actually doing these vital core practices or in approaching them in new ways. Especially in the complex, confusing, and mission-critical world of leadership.

In addition to the role of Scripture and self-examination, these four practices are emphasized in our church's efforts towards spiritual formation in leaders:

Spiritual friendship

Spiritual friendship is the intentional pursuit of friends who help you remain open to God. Spiritual friends help each other pay attention to where God's at work in their lives and help each other respond.

Leaders often live lonely lives of pretending. Sometimes, they're aware of the pretending; sometimes even they themselves are fooled. Spiritual friendship takes the "everything is together" mask off in very specific, human, in-the-moment ways. It's considered a "practice" because this vulnerability requires a willingness to enter the risky realm of being known as a person in process.

Tobias told me, "I approached friendships exactly as I was advised in seminary, 'Do not befriend anyone in your congregation.'" He had been instructed, "They need to look up to you, they need to see your example, and if you share your struggles, it will undermine your role as their leader."

He continued, "After a painful burnout, it finally dawned on me... we're telling ourselves that in order to be effective in ministry, you have to live a lie." Alone.

Admittedly, dangers lurk on the path to authentic relationships. But will we continue to live a lonely lie, or will we navigate these dangers for the hope of life and freedom and transformation? That hope is well founded. But it will take a concerted effort, and practice, to build a spiritual friendship.

Centering prayer

In working with groups, I'm often amazed at two things: One, how few leaders enjoy a vibrant experience of prayer. Second, how many leaders carry tremendous guilt about their lack of prayer. A double whammy! No wonder we don't like to talk about prayer.

Nonetheless, great healing and fueling power is released from God to us in prayer. Lynne has been a spiritual friend in my life and has guided me particularly in prayer. She introduced me to centering prayer years ago, teaching me how to silently open my soul to God.

In this form of prayer, there are no more words, no more agenda, no more striving. This is an open, surrendered, peaceful way of resting in the presence of God.

Centering prayer is not an absenting of the soul, as in eastern mysticism, but very much with God. It requires practice and patience as your soul learns to become quiet and still.

Try centering prayer for about 20 minutes once a day for a week. Be prepared for the onslaught of ideas and images that will invade you inside. No matter, you can gently release them and return to the quietness of soul (100 times per minute if your mind is like mine was when I started!). As Lynne told me, God loves your intent to be attentive, even if your attentiveness wavers with embarrassing frequency.

Over time, you can say like the psalmist, "But I have stilled and quieted my soul" (Ps. 131:2)."

Solitude

This is time alone, with God. Most leaders love solitude. They know it helps them stay sane. They realize it causes their souls to flourish. They just don't do it. Go figure.

Why is solitude so potent? Because it frees you for a while from many things that would otherwise drive you. We can be invisibly driven by our ego, our pride, our fears, our insecurities, or even other people. Solitude helps us recognize and confront voices other than the Holy Spirit.

Solitude also protects those unique parts of you that will get lost along the way if not guarded. What is that for you? Do you know what's at stake? Artists might say, "I lose my creativity." Elders say, "I lose my discernment." Leaders may say, "I lose clarity of vision."

Note what Jesus did. After a "run" of demanding ministry commitments, "very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus left the house and went off to a solitary place."

In solitude he regained clarity about his purpose. It fueled his unflinching resolve. What leader today doesn't need clarity amid clamoring voices? What leader doesn't need inner resolve to set and keep a direction? We all do. We need times of solitude.

Simplicity

In the wake of the current secular buzz around simplicity, it's important to be clear about what simplicity is and isn't from a biblical perspective. If you were to adopt the view of RealSimple magazine, for example, you'd see simplicity as intentional efforts to reduce complexity in your life. To make life more manageable. As nice as that sounds, it's not what we are after.

For a follower of Christ, the enemy of simplicity is not complexity. It's duplicity. Double mindedness. The apostle Paul hardly led a complexity-free life. But he led a life of deep integrity and focus. A singularity of purpose. That's the simplicity we seek.

Overbooking my schedule is a deeper spiritual issue than merely managing my life's complexities. At its core, it's me being dishonest about who I am and what my limits are. I'm presenting myself as one person to my many appointments, when in fact I am another.

It is an insistence upon self-rule, not upon God's calling.

Simplicity rests on single-mindedness. Letting your yes be yes, your no, no. To make progress in simplicity, you'll need to be versed in all the other practices. Simplicity is bringing one's whole self into union with God's purposes. Every dimension, every thought, every decision, under the direction of God.

I ask individuals to explore areas where they bump into their own duplicity. It may be trying to appear to be more than we are, trying to have more than we can afford, trying to do more than we really can, or shrinking back from who we really are.

Then, it takes a courageous step in the direction of simplicity, focusing on God's purposes for you, trusting that your limits are okay.

That's simplicity. That's what leads to soul health.

Mindy Caliguire is director of spiritual formation at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois.

Practicing the Presence of God... the Daily Examen

Background: Throughout the centuries, prayerful people have found helpful direction for their lives through the practice of the *Examen* (also known as the “examination of consciousness”). The examen provides a way of noticing where God shows up in your day. But always remember: He never leaves us (Joshua 1:5, Hebrews 13:5, etc.)! It is a practice that attends to what we might otherwise miss in the press of duties and busyness. The questions of the examen open our attention to how God’s internal movement is present in our external comings and goings. They lead us to listen deeply to the data of our lives. These questions help us pay attention to our mental state, our body responses and our emotional baggage. Our insomnia, nervous stomach, difficult interaction and headache can all take their place as a possible way of more deeply leaning into God. The examen helps us recognize the things that bring us life and death. Once these things are known, they become part of our ongoing interaction with our Triune God in prayer.

Biblical Basis: What do the following verses show us about how God is with us?

Genesis 21:22	Genesis 28:15	Exodus 3:12	Deuteronomy 31:6
Joshua 1:5, 9	Psalms 23:4	Isaiah 41:10	Revelation 21:3

Examen Questions: As I reflect on this day the Lord has given me (at the end of the day or reflecting back on yesterday) ...

1. Where was God present? How did He show up? How was He involved?
2. When was my deepest connection with God, others, and myself? When today did I have the least sense of connection?
3. When, during the day, did I miss Him?
4. What is God up to in my life currently?
5. What do I need to pay more attention to?
6. What was most life-giving to me? What was most life-draining (or stressful)?
7. Any sin I need to confess as I look back on the day?
8. For what am I most grateful to God for today? For what moment today am I least grateful? Why?
9. When did I give and receive the most love today? When did I give and receive the least love today?
10. Where was I aware of living out of the fruit of the Spirit? Where was there an absence of the fruit of the Spirit?

Reference: *Longing to Experience More of Jesus* (Saltszgeber), *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Calhoun)

Lectio Divina (“a Divine Reading”)

- *Lectio Divina*, “A Divine Reading”, has been around for centuries. It is a slow, reflective reading with a longing to be touched, spoken to, even transformed by God’s Word. Lectio is taking time in unhurried listening to the Word of God spoken to us right in our present moment. It can be done alone or in a small group.
- All Together: Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest with Philippians 3:4-16. (The ancient practice of *lectio divina*.)
 1. **Read** the first time listening for the word or phrase that grabs your attention.
 2. **Reflect**, as you read the second time, on how your chosen word or phrase speaks to you personally. Listen for the voice of the Spirit speaking life into your soul.
 3. **Respond** to Jesus, as you read the third time, based on what you have heard. Your response may be a request, a question, tears, praise, etc., but whatever it is, give yourself the freedom to express it honestly to your loving Lord.
 4. **Rest**, as you read the fourth time, in the truth, love, and grace of Jesus Christ. Don’t think...just enjoy the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with you.

The whole Lectio Divina discipline can last up to 30 minutes. If you are doing Lectio Divina in a group, you can have some sharing after each movement. It is encouraging to see how God engages each person uniquely in His Word.

- On Own: Read John 21:15-19
 1. **Lectio (Read)** – Slowly read out loud two times the passage of Scripture (if in a group, have two different readers). Listen as if Jesus Himself was speaking to you. Be aware of a word or a phrase that seems to grab your attention. Don’t analyze it or evaluate why it stands out to you. Have a period of silence after reading of the Word.
 2. **Meditatio (Reflect)** – Read the passage out loud again (for the third time). In the silence following the reading, you might ask, “What is going on in my life that makes this word or phrase strike me?” Maybe, you visualize yourself in the story. Maybe you are having a visceral (feeling) reaction or are aware of a deep need that this word is hitting up against. Just stay

there “chewing the cud”, so to speak, on this word or phrase, resting (you’re not uptight) and trusting that if God wants to reveal something to you, He will.

3. **Oratio (Respond)** – You are leaning in. Is God inviting me to a challenge, an exhortation, a direction of thought, an awareness, a conviction, an action, a prayer? It might be something that God wants to enter into with you, to simply be with you. Don’t hurry to the next movement.
4. **Contemplatio (Rest)** – What is the “take-away”? In total surrender, how is God leading you, realizing that you cannot do anything apart from Him and knowing He will go with you and help you? Linger in silence.

As you leave Lectio Divina, thank God for engaging with you. If there was no specific word at this time, that’s ok; there isn’t always. We can trust that something deeper than our conscious knowing was taking place in us. The present from the Lord is often times simply His presence.

Reference: *Howard Baker samples, Longing to Experience More of Jesus* (Saltszgeber)

A Prayer Walk

Biblical References: Genesis 17:1, Genesis 5:22-24, Micah 6:8, Revelation 4:11

The Hebrew idiom “to walk with someone” (Genesis 17:1) meant to befriend that person on a deep level. “Walking with God” is a metaphor for life characterized by having an intimate relationship with God in Jesus Christ. For instance, in Genesis 5, the lives of the descendants of Adam are summarized, but it is said only of Enoch that he “walked with God.”

A prayer walk is taking a slow walk with Jesus, with the intent of opening your heart to Him in your life’s “walk with Jesus” (using “walk” with a double meaning: a literal walk with your dear friend Jesus and in your life-walk with Jesus). This spiritual discipline awakens your awareness (or alerts you) to God’s presence with you. As you begin walking at an absolutely unhurried pace (maybe leave your time device behind), you invite Jesus to walk with you (Luke 24:13-25). You ask Him to open to you whatever He might want you to experience. You begin to sense your body relaxing, your breathing slowing, any tension exiting, any anxiety fading, and your spirit awakening, but at rest.

You look at things with Jesus and find yourself walking quietly, or speaking conversationally and with blunt honesty, because you know He accepts you just as you are, and is delighted you’ve chosen to walk with Him, similar to the Garden of Eden walks in the “cool of the afternoon” (Genesis 3:8). You’re enjoying keeping company with Jesus, your companion, Savior and Lord.

As you walk, you get in touch with what’s going on inside you (emotions, thoughts), and name them as best you can – not trying to fix, solve, or answer them, but just sharing them with Jesus. You also notice everything around you; and you linger, considering the small things of nature – the sounds, a leaf, a bug, the sunlight, the breeze and how it makes the grass and the leaves move. Worship of the Lord arises. You realize how all is under the care of the One “who upholds the universe by the power of His Word.” The word “worship” comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorth-scipe*, which means to attribute worth to something or someone. You might read Revelation 4:11 before you walk. Jesus made everything “for His pleasure”. As we gaze upon the beauty of His creation and the wonder of His incredible design, we are reminded of God’s greatness, and that we are part of His design as image-bearers. We realize ALL is a gift.

As you finish your walk, thank God for His life-giving and love-affirming presence. Carry experiencing Him with you the rest of the day.

From: *Longing to Experience More of Jesus*, Ty Saltzgeber

Prayer Walk: One Way of “Finding God in All Things”

Take a walk with Jesus...and for the first several minutes allow yourself to quiet down outwardly and inwardly...let go for now of any anxieties, fears, worries, and preoccupations...and simply be...

Now begin to notice....

Creation... “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” **Romans 1:20 (NRSV)**

- As you look around you what does creation tell you about God’s power and divine nature?

Heavens... “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” **Psalms 19:1 (NRSV)**

- As you attend to your surroundings and look upward, what do you see of the glory of God?

Birds... “Do not worry about your life...Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” **Matthew 6:25-26 (NRSV)**

- Be on the lookout for birds. What do they tell you about God’s care and provision?

Flowers... “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?” **Matthew 6:28-30 (NRSV)**

- What does the beauty of flowers and plants have to do with worry and faith? What happens for you when you stop to “consider” the flowers?

Insects... “Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways, and be wise.” **Prov. 6:6 (NRSV)**

- What is the Lord saying to you about your character as you observe an ant or other insect?

Howard Baker (Denver Seminary)

Another Prayer Walk Method

From: *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Calhoun

Prayer walking is a way of saturating a place and people with prayer. This discipline draws us out of prayers that are limited to our immediate concerns and into a larger circle of God's loving attention. Sometimes prayer walking precedes a particular mission endeavor. A person or team of people go beforehand to walk through the neighborhood, country or specific area in order to pray. It can be a one-time event or part of an ongoing prayer ministry.

Some examples are: your home, your church, your neighborhood, campus, military base, workplace, school/playground, a city or country you are visiting, etc.

Choosing Gratitude and Thankfulness

- Biblical Basis: Psalm 136:1-2; I Thessalonians 5:16-18; Colossians 3:15-17; Luke 17:11-17; Philippians 4:6-7
 1. What do these verses teach us about thankfulness? How does thankfulness apply in your life today?

- Some Thoughts on Gratitude/Thankfulness:
 1. Choosing gratitude (i.e. an attitude of gratitude, being thankful, expressing thanks every day, throughout the day), seems so simple, but its effects are profound and wide-reaching – on us, on others, and our fellowship with God. The Hebrew term for gratitude is *hikarat hatov*, means “recognizing the good.” In whatever our day has been, in whatever circumstances have been dealt to us, we don’t have to dig too deeply to find a lot of good, for which to be thankful. Even when life may give us lemons of sorts, we should try to make something which at least resembles lemonade and be thankful for that!
 2. Gratitude comes from a heart’s desire to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting toward God for His presence with us and within His world. Though “blessings” can move us into gratitude, it is not at the root of a thankful heart. Delight in God and His good will is the heartbeat of thankfulness.
 3. The Practice of Gratitude includes:
 - Prayers and songs that focus on God’s generosity to us
 - Gratefully giving and sharing all I am and have as a sign of my thankfulness to God
 - Expressing gratitude to others; the habit of saying “thank you,” “I am so grateful,” “you are so kind” and so forth
 - Gratefully noticing God’s presence and gifts throughout the day
 - Practicing an *abundance* mentality; counting the blessings of life
 - Keeping a gratitude journal of the myriad gifts God has brought you
 4. God-given fruit from this:
 - Keeping company with Jesus no matter what happens
 - Being aware of the abundance of gifts, benefits, mercies and grace that have been poured into my life
 - Curbing critical tendencies by upstaging them with thanksgiving
 - Seeing what I have as quickly as I see what I don’t have
 - Treasuring and valuing people by thanking them often and clearly for who they are to me or to someone else
 - Daily thanking the Lord for His presence in my life
 - Noticing my lack of gratitude and repenting of the idol that has my heart at that moment
 - Receiving everything I have as a gift rather than as an entitlement
 - A helpful hedge against bitterness

➤ Reflection Questions:

1. When you feel at the bottom of the food chain and dead last in terms of priority, how do you move toward gratitude?
2. When have you found that in retrospect you could have been thankful for something that you were not grateful for at the time it was happening? How can this perspective inform your life now?
3. How has a grateful person affected your own vision of what matters in life?
4. How has someone who lives out of bitterness affected your life?
5. How are you addicted to criticism, analysis and negativity? How might thankfulness be an antidote to a critical spirit?

➤ Gratitude/Thankfulness Exercises

1. Begin a gratitude journal by keeping records of the many blessings/abundances God has given you. Next to each one, write what it means to you to have a God who graciously interacts and intervenes in your life. Notice what you have been given that you do not deserve. What do you want to say to God about these things?
2. End every day by saying thank you to God for at least one thing. Then tell God what that one thing means to you.
3. Write a letter of thanks to someone who has touched your life in the past year, the past month, and/or the past week.
4. Get a current hardship firmly in mind. How do you feel about this hardship? Tell the truth to God. Where is there evidence of God's presence in this hardship? Is there anything you can be thankful for in this hardship?
5. What sort of things tend to encourage you in thankfulness? Praise songs? Worship? Time spent with friends? Giving and receiving presents? Remembering God's faithfulness in the past? Plan ways of incorporating the things that encourage thankfulness into your life on a regular basis.
6. Hold a thank-you party. Invite the people you want to honor with a thank you.
7. Create a thank you scrapbook. Beside photos and pictures, write your prayers of thanksgiving.
8. Notice your tendency to make comparisons that result in feelings of dissatisfaction or entitlement. Practice abstaining from comparative statements about what you don't have or how you measure up to others. Instead give thanks for what you do have and who you truly are.
9. Spend time with the Lord and ask Him what may be holding you back from thankfulness (see attached Navigator discipleship tool as a guide).

Reference: *Longing to Experience More of Jesus* (Ty Saltzgeber), *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Calhoun)



Navigator Discipleship Tool

At Thanksgiving, we list the things for which we're thankful but often fall short of having a day-to-day "attitude of gratitude."



GRATITUDE *or* PLATITUDE?

When the Thanksgiving season rolls around many of us find ourselves confronted with our shortcomings in the area of giving thanks. It's a little bit like facing the New Year and all those resolutions we didn't follow through on last year. And yet, we know we're supposed to be thankful. After all, the Bible tells us to "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

So on Thanksgiving, we sit around the table and list the things for which we're thankful. That's not a bad thing to do. And sometimes we really mean it. But so often it falls so far short of having that "attitude of gratitude" that we know God really desires. Our prayers of gratitude are sometimes just platitudes. We say the right words but we're not really people who are characterized by a thankful spirit.

The author of Hebrews, however, gives us a slightly different perspective on giving thanks:

"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15, NASB).

Giving thanks is a sacrifice of praise. A sacrifice, by definition, costs us something. What does giving thanks cost us? What do we have to give up in order to be grateful?

PRIDE: Sometimes we're not grateful because we think we deserve something. We feel that we earned it or that it is ours by right. You don't thank your employer for your paycheck because you earned it. You may be thankful for your job, however, because there are a lot of people just as qualified as you who don't have jobs. Giving thanks can be a humbling proposition.

RESENTMENT: There are times when we're not thankful because we don't have exactly what we want (or think we want). Someone else has more than we do, or their life seems

to be better. And yet, Scripture says that God gives us perfect gifts (James 1:17).

PRIORITIES: When Jesus healed 10 lepers (Luke 17:11-19), only one of them came back to thank him. Jesus even asked, "Where are the other nine?" The Bible doesn't give us an answer. Wherever they were and whatever they were doing was more important to them than thanking Jesus. For one, however, giving thanks was the most important thing he could think of. And Jesus told him, "... your faith has made you well."

There may be other things that keep us from developing thankful hearts—from being grateful people. But these are a good place to start. This year, before you sit down to Thanksgiving dinner and share your list of things you're thankful for, grab a few minutes alone with God and ask Him to show you what things might be keeping you from being a thankful person.



THIS TOOL IS MEANT TO BE SHARED. To download a copy visit: navlink.org/gratitude-or-platitude

Jesus-Focused Centering Prayer (a.k.a. Breath Prayer or Prayer of the Heart)

“Pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17)

Background: Jesus-focused Centering Breath Prayer reminds us that just as we can't live only on one breath of air, we can't live only on one breath of God. The Triune God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breathe Him in all day long. After all, it is in Him that “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Breath prayer reminds us that each breath we are given is God's gift and that God's Spirit is nearer to us than our own breath. This prayer discipline depends on a disposition of listening with a spirit of receptivity to God, who often speaks to us in a whisper or with a nudge. Doing this helps us abide more deeply in Christ at various times during the day, as well as overcome temptation, fear, anxiety, and stress in His grace and power. Breath or prayer of the heart has been practiced in the church for millennia.

Prayer Posture and Example Prayer: Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bow your head, close your eyes and breathing softly, in your heart and mind, look to the Lord. Let your thoughts flow from your head to your heart and say, while breathing in and out, **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner saved by Your grace...”** Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts as much as able. When your mind wanders or you get distracted, return to the Lord with “Lord Jesus Christ ...” Be worshipful, persevering, abiding in Christ, and repeat several times.

Try it...

Note: This Jesus prayer combines “Son of David, have mercy on me (Luke 18:39)”, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner (Luke 18:13)”, and “For by grace you have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8)”

Personal-Word-for-the Lord Breath Prayer Method (10-20 minutes): choose a short “personal word”, which is a word or phrase that best captures your current season of life and relationship with Jesus. For instance, “Abba (Daddy) [breathe in], I belong to You” [breathe out] or “Abba [breathe in], guard my heart [breathe out], Abba [breathe in], guide my steps [breathe out]” or “Gracious Lord, I welcome and invite Your abiding presence in my life today – more of You and less of me” or “Holy One [breathe in], keep me true [breathe out]” or “Lord [breathe in], here I am [breathe out]”

1. Sit Relaxed and Quiet.
2. Rest into God, who dwells in the center of your being.
3. Repeat your personal words prayer, gently supporting your soaking in the hot bathwater of God's love for you.

4. Whenever you're aware of a distraction or a wondering thought, gently return to Jesus with your personal word.
5. At the end of your time (maybe set an alarm, so not always checking) whisper a short prayer (or the Lord's prayer). Thank God for His presence with you.
6. As you re-enter the busyness, you hopefully will find that your quiet center in Jesus still holds.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you practice Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17)?
2. How do you pray in a way that keeps you as conscious as possible of Christ's presence in you?
3. How does the thought of repetitive prayer strike you?
4. What are the up sides and down sides of repetitive prayer?
5. How might a breath or centering prayer be shorthand for a longer prayer of your heart?
6. What happens inside you when you are quiet in this type of prayer with the Lord?

Reference: *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Calhoun), *Longing to Experience More of Jesus* (Saltszgeber)

Spend an Hour or Two with God

Spend an hour or two with God? It is easier than you think. Break it up into 5- or 10-minute blocks and focus on the following during each 5- or 10-minute segment:



1. PRAISE

Start your prayer hour by praising the Lord. Praise Him for things that are on your mind right now. Praise Him for one special thing He has done in your life in the past week. Praise Him for His goodness to your family.

*I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.
Psalm 34:1*

2. WAITING

Spend this time waiting on the Lord. Let Him pull together reflections for you. Think about the hour before you and the things you want the Lord to do in your life.

*Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.
Psalm 27:14*

3. CONFESSION

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you anything in your life which might be displeasing to Him. Ask Him to point out attitudes that are wrong, as well as specific acts for which you have not confessed to Him. Now confess that to the Lord and claim 1 John 1:9 so that you might be cleansed for the remainder of the hour before you, and then pick up and read the Word.

Psalm 51:1-19

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion

blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem.

Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

4. READ THE WORD

Spend time reading promises of God in the Psalms, in the prophets, and passages on prayer located in the New Testament. Check your concordance.

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.
Psalm 119:97

Or John 15:1-17

5. PETITION This is general requests for others, praying through your prayer list, prayer cards, or personal prayer interests on behalf of yourself and others.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
Hebrews 4:16

6. INTERCESSION Specific prayer on the behalf of others. Pray specifically for those requests of which you are aware. (Romans 15:30-33)

I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.
Romans 15:30-33

7. PRAY THE WORD

Now take the Scriptures and start praying the Scriptures as certain sections of Psalm 119 lend themselves beautifully to prayer expression.

Psalm 119:38-48

Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared.

Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good.

How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.

*May your unfailing love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise;
then I will answer the one who taunts me, for I trust in your word.
Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws.
I will always obey your law, for ever and ever.
I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.
I will speak of your statutes before kings and will not be put to shame,
for I delight in your commands because I love them.
I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.*

8. THANKSGIVING

Spend these minutes giving thanks to the Lord for things in your life, things on behalf of the church, things on behalf of your family.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.
Philippians 4:6*

9. SINGING

Take a hymnal or sing a praise song from memory. Let it be a time of praise.

*O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.
Psalm 59:17*

10. MEDITATE

Ask the Lord to speak to you and keep a paper and pen handy, ready to relate the impressions that He makes upon your life.

Psalm 63:1-11

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.
Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.
I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.*

My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

They who seek my life will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.

They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals.

But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

11. LISTEN

Spend time merging the things you have read from the Word, the things you have prayed, the things you have thanked the Lord for, the things that you have been singing, and see how the Lord brings them all together to speak to you.

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

1 Samuel 3:9-10

12. END WITH PRAISE

Praise the Lord for the time you have had to spend with Him. Praise Him for the impressions that He has given you. Praise Him for the prayer requests He raised up in your mind.

Psalm 145:1-21

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.

Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.

They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.

They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you.

They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,

so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.

The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.



Navigator Discipleship Tool

SPENDING EXTENDED TIME IN PRAYER

In the midst of our busy lives, it can be incredibly valuable to go beyond morning devotions and spend extended time alone with God in prayer. God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). Like many personal relationships, this fellowship is nurtured by spending time together.

An extended time in prayer also gives increased opportunity to think of the world from God's point of view, especially when going through some difficulty or making big decisions. We need God's perspective to sharpen our vision of the unseen, and to let the immediate, tangible things drop into proper place.

Scheduling your time

Divide your time into three parts:

- Wait on the Lord with an open heart to realize His presence and to be cleansed.
- Pray for others. Ask specific things for them. Use Paul's prayers in the New Testament (such as Romans 15:5-6) to pray for them and pray for them what you are praying for yourself.
- Pray for yourself. Be totally honest with God.

What to take with you

The essential items to have with you are a Bible, paper, and a pen or pencil. Other helpful items include:

- Prayer letters from missionaries and other Christian workers
- A favorite devotional book
- Your current prayer list
- Your quiet time journal
- Scripture memory cards
- Notes from your last extended time in prayer

How to stay awake and alert

- Get adequate rest the night before.
- Change positions—sit a while, walk around, sit, walk, and so on.
- Have variety in what you do. Read the Scriptures, then prayer, then write, and so on.
- Pray aloud—in a whisper or soft voice if necessary.

Taking notes

Taking notes during your extended time in prayer will give you a record of the things the Lord is speaking to you, as well as helping you keep your time organized.

In addition, when we pray we often have something come to mind that we feel we should take action on, or that we have forgotten to do—perhaps totally unrelated to what we are praying about. By keeping paper ready to list these things, we can avoid prolonged distraction and act on them later.

Toward the end of your time in prayer you will want to spend a few minutes writing down some conclusions. Summarize the major impressions of your time. Keep these notes in a notebook and review them weekly for a while. This will ensure that you follow through on the things God has impressed on you.



THIS TOOL IS MEANT TO BE SHARED. To download a copy visit navlink.org/extended-prayer
Adapted from The 27 Series®. Used by permission of NavPress.

Listen

When you listen you affirm me,
but your listening must be real:
sensitive and serious,
not busily looking around,
not with a worried or distracted frown,
not preparing what you will say next,
but giving me your full attention.

You are telling me that I am a person of value,
important and worth listening to,
one with whom you will share yourself.

I have ideas to share,
feelings which too often I keep to myself,
deep questions which struggle inside me for answers.

I have hopes only tentatively acknowledged
which are not easy to share,
and pain and guilt and fear I try to stifle.

These are sensitive areas and a real part of me,
but it takes courage to confide in another.

I need to listen too if we are to come close.

How can I tell you I understand?

I can show interest with my eyes or and an occasional word,
attuned to pick up not only the spoken words,
but also the glimmer of a smile,
a look of pain, the hesitation, the struggle
which may suggest something as yet too deep for words.

So let us take time together,
respecting the other's freedom,
encouraging without hurrying,
understanding that some things may never be brought to light,
but others may emerge if given time,

Each, through this listening, enriches the other
with the priceless gift of intimacy.

Triad/ Pairs Processing Times

- Triad/Pairs Processing Time #1

What is the Lord speaking to my heart and desiring me to grow in so far:

- a. For my own abiding in the Lord?
- b. For the sake of my family?
- c. For the sake of those I also minister to?

- Triad/Pairs Processing Time #2

What is the Lord speaking to my heart and desiring me to grow in so far:

- a. For my own abiding in the Lord?
- b. For the sake of my family?
- c. For the sake of those I also minister to?

Whole Group Processing Time

What has been my biggest blessing and/or growth area from today?

What has been my biggest difficulty or challenge from today?

What is the Lord speaking to my heart and desiring me to grow in so far:

- a. For my own abiding in the Lord?

- b. For the sake of my family?

- c. For the sake of those I also minister to?