



SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

PRACTICING THE
PRESENCE OF GOD

*COMPILED BY
REV. DR. DEBORAH
SUDDARTH*



**COLLIERVILLE UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH**
434 W. POPLAR AVE.
COLLIERVILLE, TN 38017
WWW.COLLIERVILLEUMC.ORG
901.853.8383

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

1. Each Spiritual Discipline below has a page or two with notes, questions to ponder, Scriptures, and exercises to help you grow in your knowledge and experience.
2. Feel free to “google” things that might be totally new or unfamiliar to you. In the interest of simplicity, I did not go into a lot of depth.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

NOTE: THIS IS NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST

**SPIRITUAL READING
PRAYER & MEDITATION
FASTING
HOSPITALITY
SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE
WORSHIP**

FOR MORE READING

1. Bass, Dorothy C., ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997.
2. Foster, Richard J. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.
3. Kincannon, Karla M. *LifeSearch: Spiritual Disciplines*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
4. Schnase, Robert. *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010.
5. Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.
6. Young, Sarah. *Jesus Calling*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004.

SPIRITUAL READING

- I. We are what we think:
 - *Philippians 4:8-9*
 - When are some times your thoughts or emotions and your health seemed linked? We can choose to be shaped positively or negatively by God and/or the culture.
- II. What are things that shape your life (thoughts and/or beliefs)? And how? Others?
Persons Experiences Books/Stories Lessons Church
- III. Lectio Divina – Holy or Sacred Reading
 - A. The purpose of spiritual reading is that every passage of
 1. Scripture has the power to transform our daily experience
 2. Because God is active in every piece of Scripture.
 - B. We gradually will grow more into the likeness of Christ
 - C. Sacred Reading is for Devotion vs. study/research
 - D. Purpose – LISTENING FOR GOD
 1. What is God’s message for me?
 2. What is God trying to say to me through this text?
- IV. Getting Started with Holy or Sacred Reading
 - A. Start with an Open heart, open mind, and unhurried time
 - B. Select a passage [no more than 10-12 verses] – suggestions below
 - C. Set aside 30 minutes (suggested)
 - D. Find a place for solitude & comfortable posture (silence or soft music)
 - E. Relax, center, be open to God’s presence
 - F. Read slowly – let words and images bubble up from your mind
 - G. Ask questions: how does this apply to my life now?
 1. Why is this message important for me?
 2. Which character would I be?
 3. With whom do I identify?
 4. How do the characters feel about one another?
 5. What are the sights, sounds, and smells?
 6. What do I discover about myself in the process
 - H. Let a prayer emerge from your heart (for yourself and others)
 - I. Do not rush to be finished – sit in God’s presence - Remember that we are....PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD!!
 - J. Take an image or word from your reading or prayer into the day - you may have new thoughts
- V. Scripture suggestions for Practicing the Presence of God:
 - *Romans 12:1-2* - *Psalms 51:5-15*
 - *Ecclesiastes 3:1-11* - *Mark 5:1-20*
 - *Mark 16:1-8* - *Romans 5:1-8*
 - *Philippians 2:4-11*

(Over)

- VI. Sacred Reading does not have to be all Scripture. You can read on other topics like:
- Finding a Spiritual Director
 - Spiritual Practices – remember this book is not exhaustive
 - Prayers written by others, like Saints, children, books full of prayers Daily Devotions
 - Biographies of Saints
 - Good Stories, i.e., Chicken Soup for the Soul, Max Lucado Children's Stories
 - Life Lessons Learned
 - Christian Authors
- VII. Is it working? You will know by it's fruit.
Does it produce in your life – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control? *Galatians 5:22*
- VIII. Sue Monk Kidd – *When the Heart Waits*
*“To be fully human, fully myself,
To accept all that I am, all that you [God] envision, This is my prayer.
Walk with me out to the rim of life,
Beyond Security.
Take me to the exquisite edge of courage
And release me to become.”*

PRAYER: COMMUNING WITH GOD

- I. *1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18*
“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
 - i. Why, where, how, and when do you pray?
 - ii. If God already knows what we need before we ask, why pray?
- II. What is Prayer? **PRAY→LISTEN→ACT**
 1. How we see God affects our view of prayer?
 - Do you see God as a JUDGE who waits for us to mess up so we can be punished?
 - Or as a CREATOR who loves, cares and forgives?
 2. The purpose of prayer is – to be with God
 3. Prayer is a gift from God so that we might be in relationship
- III. How should we pray?
 1. We are to be as children when we pray:
OPEN→TRUSTING→HONEST
 2. Pray with the expectation that change will occur
 3. Listening as well as talking is vital in prayer.
 - How do you **LISTEN** for God’s voice?
 - Scripture, Nature, Others, Intuition, Dreams
 4. Prayer is incomplete without **ACTION**. *1 Corinthians 3: 5-9*
- **FELLOW WORKER WITH GOD**
- IV. Why do we pray?
- V. How & when do we listen?
- VI. What are different ways we pray?
- VII. How do we ACT out of prayer?
- VIII. The Lord’s Prayers: *Matthew 6: 5-15*
 1. What three concerns related to God did Jesus pray about first? (vv. 9/10)
 2. What did Jesus pray for next? (v. 11)
 3. How do you see your needs different than how God sees your needs?
 4. What did Jesus pray about forgiveness? (vv.12 & 14)
 5. How did Jesus pray for our protection? (v. 13)
 6. Why are both prayer by one’s self and prayer with others important?
- IX. One model for outlining your prayers ~ A.C.T.S.
 - A – adoration/praise for who God is
 - C – confession of our sins and shortcomings
 - T – thanksgiving for what God has done and for the gift of forgiveness
 - S – supplication/to petition God for others and ourselves
(do not forget to **LISTEN TO GOD**)
- X. See information on Labyrinths on next page

LABYRINTH

WWW.LABYRINTHCOMPANY.COM/ABOUTLABYRINTHS/HISTORY.HTML

WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?

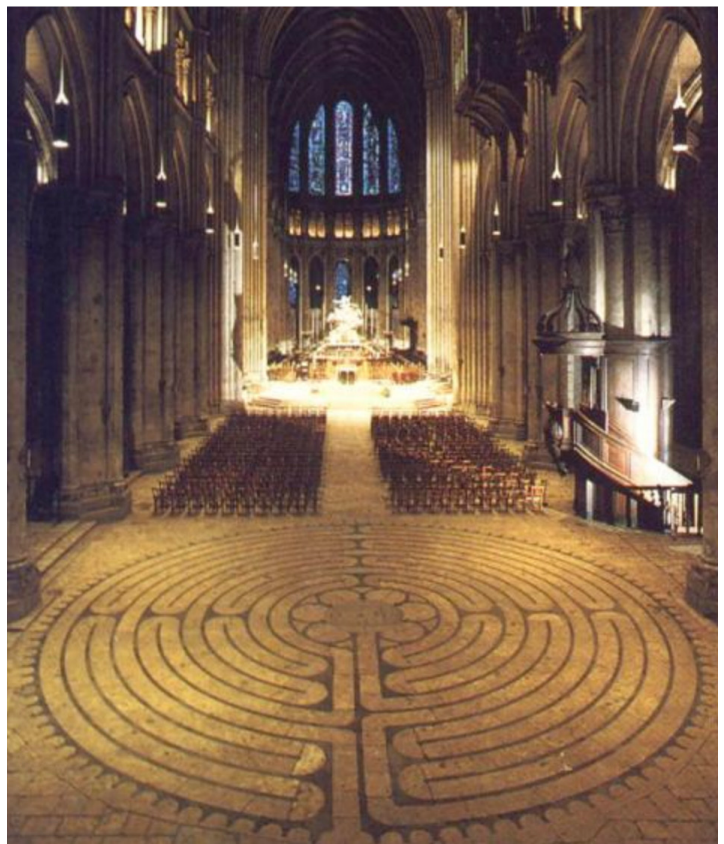
Labyrinths are ancient human symbols known to go back at least 3500 years and probably much older. They appeared on most inhabited continents in prehistory, with examples known from North & South America, Africa, Asia and across Europe from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia. The labyrinth symbol was incorporated into the floors of the great Gothic pilgrimage cathedrals of France in the twelfth & thirteenth centuries. The most famous extant design is the example in the nave floor of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres outside of Paris. This labyrinth was built of honey colored limestone with marble lines around the year 1200 and is now over 800 years old.

WHY DO WE WALK LABYRINTH?

A labyrinth is not a maze, but a walking meditation device with a single winding path from the edge to the center. There are no tricks, choices or dead ends in a labyrinth walk. The same path is used to return to the outside. Combining a number of even older symbols, including the circle, spiral and meander, the labyrinth represents the journey inward to our own true selves and back out into the everyday world.

Walking a labyrinth is a right brain activity (creative, intuitive, imaginative), and can induce or enhance a contemplative or meditative state of mind. It is a tool which can clear the mind, calm our anxieties during periods of transition and stress, guide healing, deepen self-knowledge, enhance creativity, allow for reconciliation, restore feelings of belonging to a community, and lead to personal and spiritual growth.

For many walkers the labyrinth becomes a metaphor for the journey of life: although full of twists and turns, each of us is on a single path through his or her life, and yet each person's journey is a separate and distinct qualitative experience. In walking labyrinths, modern seekers are emulating and recapturing the pilgrimage tradition of many ancient faiths.



FASTING: CREATING HOLY SPACE

"Ultimately to fast means only one thing: to be hungry - to go to the limit of that human condition which depends entirely on food and being hungry, to discover that this dependency is not the whole truth about (us), that hunger itself is first of all a spiritual state and that it is in its last reality hunger for God."

- Alexander Schmemmann

- I. Why Fast?
 - Jewish traditions: a. penitence and b. repentance
 - A way of humbling oneself before God
 - A way to prepare for challenges and important tasks -
Esther 4:16
 - Jesus; combined fasting and prayer
 - Think about Lent (40 Days) and the Easter Festival
- II. Scripture: *"Jesus clearly required the outward act of fasting to match the inward attitude of humility; this was the proper spirit of fasting."* Spiritual Disciplines, p. 2
 - *Matthew 6:16-18*
 - *Luke 18:9-14*
- III. Fasting:
 - A. Not harmful if you use common sense.
 - B. Do not do it if pregnant, ill, have a weakened physical condition or under great amounts of stress.
 - C. Fasting lessens one's normal energies.
 - D. To prepare do not over eat, but eat light meals.
 - E. Start with a 24 hour fast, drinking plenty of fruit juices and water.
 - F. While you fast, dedicate all you do during the day to the glory of God. If possible, use the time normally given to meals and meal preparation to pray.
 - G. When breaking a fast, do not gorge, but eat a light meal.
- IV. What takes the place of food?
 - Time with God ~ Bible reading, spiritual reading, journaling, prayer, etc.
 - Become aware of your need for food/God
 - Think about what you use food for: repress uncomfortable feelings, to reward ourselves for a job well done, to give us energy when we need sleep or to subdue our restlessness.
 - How can we use God in these situations rather than food?

HOSPITALITY: AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

- I. Scripture
 1. *Matthew 25: 31-46*
 2. *Luke 10: 25-37*
 3. Strangers, enemies and the “least of these”
- II. What is Hospitality?

“Hospitality means receiving the other, from the heart, into my own dwelling place. It entails providing for the need, comfort, and delight of the other with all openness, respect, freedom, tenderness, and joy that love itself embodies.”

- Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast*, pg. 122

 - the other. . .(stranger)
 - from the heart. . .
 - into my own dwelling place. . .
 - providing for. . .
 - openness. . .that love itself embodies. .
- III. History
 - Hebrew nomads living in the desert
 - In order to survive they had to share all that they had (food and shelter)
 - Ancient Near East and in Israel today
 - Dining developed into a place of deep intimacy – best friends
 - Jesus relied on others for food and shelter
- IV. Our Concern . . .
 - With the body as well as the spirit
 - Food & drink, rest & shelter, protection & care, enjoyment & peace
- V. What about our safety?
 - How do we maintain personal safety and still be obedient to the discipline of hospitality?
 - How can we offer hospitality in the 21st Century? What does it look like now? How is it the same and how is it different?
- VI. Who are the strangers in our midst?
 - How do we welcome others?
- VII. Entertaining Angels?
 - Hospitality is a way of receiving God’s presence.
 - Hospitality means receiving as well as giving.
- VIII. When is a time that you offered hospitality?
 - When is a time that hospitality was offered to you?

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

- I. Opening Prayer:
*“Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
to love what is worth loving,
to praise what delights you most,
to value what is precious in your sight,
to hate what is offensive to you.
Do not let me judge by what I see, nor pass sentence according to what I hear but to
judge rightly between things that differ,
and above all to search out
and do what pleases you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”
Thomas a Kempis (1380? – 1471)*
- II. What is a Spiritual Director?
 - a. Someone who has looked deeply into their inner life and continues to take time for growth and prayer
 - b. A teacher who assists others to navigate the sea of faith by helping others learn to discern and articulate their own experience of God
- III. Scripture:
 - *Matthew 18:20 ~ “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am among them.”*
 - Q: What difference does it make to know that Christ is present when two or three gather in his name?
 - *Ephesians 4:15 ~ “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”*
 - Q: What does it mean to grow up into the likeness of Christ?
 - Q: Do you have persons in your life who “speak the truth in love” and who help you mature in your faith
- IV. Spiritual Direction is not Psychotherapy, nor Pastoral counseling
“In the midst of the events and crises of life, God is always at the center of spiritual direction.”
 - a. It is a means of GRACE – we learn the inward teachings of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. It is rooted in HOPE – “the hope that the road will rise to meet us as we take the next step on the journey of life.”
 - c. It is about LETTING GO – releasing those things that get in our way of our relationship with God and Christ.
- V. What if I decide that I want a Spiritual Director?
 - a. Find someone who is experienced, trustworthy and mature
 - b. Seek a good listener.
 - c. Someone who is not about domination or submission.
 - d. Honesty is of the utmost importance.
 - e. Form a covenant of what is to be expected from both parties and your time together.
- VI. Who can I contact for more information? Carol Ingram is a church member who is a trained Spiritual Director and has worked with our Memphis Conference in this area. She is willing to answer any questions you might have about spiritual direction and even help you find a Spiritual Director in the area that might best fit your needs. You may contact her via email at carolingram53@gmail.com.

WORSHIP: PRAISE & THANKSGIVING

- I. What are some of your favorite Hymns? Those hymns that assure you of God's presence in your life? Can't remember the title or want to find the words? Google a few words or a line and I bet it will come right up!
- II. Mark 12:28-30 "Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength'"
- III. Worship Words:
 - a. Liturgy - describes the prayers and readings in worship
 - actually means "the work of the people"
 - Worship then is our work!
 - b. Eucharist - the Lord's Supper
 - actually means "thanksgiving"
 - "Gratitude is a natural response to any gift, including the Gift of God's love in Jesus Christ."
 - c. Worship is a matter of our allowing God to enter into our heart.
 - center of the personality - one's whole being!!
- IV. Worship as a Discipline
 - Q: If worship is our work, gratitude, and letting God be in the center of our lives, then why do we only worship once a week?
 - We need to develop a worshipful outlook on all of life.
 - *****Everything we do then becomes an act of worship.**
- V. Work All Week IN Worship
 - We need to live in worship all week. Just think about the change it would make in your weekly COMMUNAL worship experience.
 - Q: How? Through the PRACTICING OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD
 - Through spiritual disciplines.
 - a. Pray for the worship leaders and the preparation of worship.
 - b. Read the Scripture ahead of time.
 - c. Imagine Jesus is walking with you always (spiritual guidance)
 - d. Treat others as you would want them to treat you in a worshipful manner (hospitality)
 - e. Create a space for God in your life daily and right before the service (worship) starts (fasting).
- VI. Fruit of Worship
 - We will have loved God, loved our self, and loved our neighbor in worship. And then our actions toward others will be changed as we take a spirit of worship into our week.