

FAITH

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PRACTICES



HOLY HABITS THAT HELP US
LOVE GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR,
LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT,
AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS

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Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
Ministries**

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AN INVITATION



Are you worn out and looking for something life-giving to sustain you through life's ups and downs? Are you a new Christian interested in exploring how your faith can keep growing? Are you a seasoned Christian who wants a deeper relationship with God?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, this resource is for you.

Faith Practices is an introduction to some of the practical "spiritual disciplines" that Christians throughout the centuries have used to draw closer to God. Exploring these practices will help you to love and seek God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. For more on faith practices, visit crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject.

God is longing to meet you in quiet moments when you take time to stop and be still—and also in frantic moments, scary times, and times when you lose your way. You're invited to enter these practices with hope, expectation, and all the grace you need. And when you get off track, don't beat yourself up—simply start again. God is still there.

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you."*

—Matthew 7:7

WHAT ARE FAITH PRACTICES?



FAITH PRACTICES ARE REPEATED ACTIONS THAT HELP US GROW IN OUR LOVE FOR GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR, LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS.

When we think of faith practices, or spiritual disciplines, most of us think of prayer, Bible reading, and worship. **But there's a whole world of practices that can help us grow in our love for God and our neighbor:** practices like celebration, wonder, remembering, and listening.

As the name suggests, faith practices are things we do repeatedly. They train us to become more spiritually sensitive. **They're not about getting better at being good—they're holy habits that help God's Word and God's character sink deep into us.**

There are many different faith practices that can revitalize our relationship with God and our neighbor. In this resource we'll take a look at twelve practices:

- Sabbath
- Gratitude
- Generosity

What Are Faith Practices?

- Hospitality
- Engaging Scripture
- Justice and mercy
- Listening
- Celebrating
- Prayer
- Wonder
- Remembering
- Service

Intrigued? Circle three of these practices that you'd like to learn more about.

WHO ARE FAITH PRACTICES FOR?



One of the saddest misconceptions is that faith practices or spiritual disciplines are only for people who are superspiritual, such as monks, nuns, and saints. But nothing could be further from the truth!

Faith practices are for everyone.

They're for people of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest. They're for preschoolers, teens, and people in the "third third" of life. They're for people who have just met God and for people who've been walking the path of faith for a long time.

Faith practices are for you!

They're for you when you're feeling close to God, and they're for you when you can't find the words to pray. They're for you when everything is going right and when everything feels wrong. God longs to spend time with you through these practices—because you are God's dearly loved child.

WHY DO WE DO FAITH PRACTICES?



Here are three reasons why engaging with faith practices is important in the Christian life.

To increase our attentiveness to the Holy Spirit
Spiritual disciplines train us to give our attention to the Holy Spirit. This attentiveness is an act of submission to God, recognizing that the Spirit is the primary actor in our ongoing transformation as disciples of Jesus Christ.

We can't make ourselves more Christlike by our own efforts. We need the Spirit to lead us, to shape our character, to transform our relationships. We need the Spirit to give birth to new desires in us, including the desire to live more fully like Jesus Christ. Faith practices help us to recognize and respond to the Spirit moving in us, through us, and around us.

To cultivate the character of Jesus Christ
At their heart, spiritual disciplines aim to cultivate Jesus' life and character in us. Writing to some of the earliest disciples, the apostle Paul describes himself as being "in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed" in them (Galatians 4:19).

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As we put various spiritual disciplines into practice, the Spirit tends to grow Jesus' life and character in us. We begin to act, think, and even desire in ways like Jesus does.

In this way, faith practices help to cultivate the soil of our hearts in which the Holy Spirit grows our capacity to both receive and imitate "Christ's self-giving, poured-out, redemptive love" (Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*) as we engage with God, with our neighbors (including our enemies), and with creation.

To strengthen our love for God and others

In the end, faith practices align us with the trajectory of God's love. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., describes spiritual formation as "a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others" (*Invitation to a Journey*). As we engage in faith practices, we develop a love for others that embodies Christ's compassion and even tears down dividing walls of hostility (Ephesians 2:11-22).

Spiritual disciplines are not designed to reassure us of our own goodness. Rather, they send us out to love our neighbors with the love that God has for us, which in turn deepens and expands our love for God.

HOW DO I BEGIN?



Choose a practice to focus on

Take a look at the practices outlined here, or check out Adele Calhoun's *Spiritual Practices Handbook*. Which practice piques your interest? Which one would you like to know more about?

Are you a creative, out-of-the-box thinker? Start with the practice of wonder. Are you exhausted and depleted? Focus on a sabbath practice. If you need God's direction, explore the practice of listening.

Then decide whether you'd like to focus on that practice for a week, a month, or more. Since we're introducing 12 practices in this resource, exploring one each month is a possibility. If that's too much at once, do what works for you.

Make a plan

Make a plan for how, when, and where you will engage with your chosen practice. It's not easy to begin new habits, so give yourself a helping hand. Find a time that works for you. Create calendar reminders, leave yourself notes, or set an alarm. Find a buddy or a small group who would like to explore the same practice, and share your experiences together.

FAITH PRACTICES

Invite God to meet you

Begin your new practice with prayer, inviting God to meet you through that practice and to guide you into a closer relationship with God and with your neighbor:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I open my heart to you at the beginning of this journey. Fill me and shape me.

EXPLORING
»————»
THE PRACTICES



HELPFUL TOOLS FOR ENGAGING FAITH PRACTICES



In the following pages you will find references to two tools that can help you engage with faith practices: *lectio divina* and journaling.

Lectio divina

For each of the faith practices in this resource we've included a few passages to explore using a method called *lectio divina* (Latin for “divine reading”)—an ancient method of engaging Scripture that is used by Christians from many traditions.

Lectio divina is an excellent way to listen to God. It's an important partner to traditional Bible study, which focuses more on understanding the Word of God.

Typically, *lectio divina* includes four actions. You can find many good online descriptions of how to use this tool, but here's a brief summary:

Read. Read the Scripture passage slowly. Notice which words or phrases catch your attention.

Meditate. Read the passage again, focusing on the parts that stood out in your first reading. Wonder what God might be trying to show you.

Pray. Read the passage a third time. Tell God the thoughts or questions that the passage has sparked in you, and invite God to speak to you.

Contemplate. Simply sit quietly in God's presence, resting in God's deep love for you.

Journaling

Writing in a journal is, for many people, an excellent way to connect with God. You can use your journal entries to have an ongoing conversation with God; to record how, when, where, and with whom you encounter God in your everyday life; or to explore questions you have about your faith.

Journaling is also a good way to process new learning and to understand one's thoughts and emotions. Many journalers will tell you that they write *in order to* understand something, not *because* they understand.

For each of the twelve practices in this resource we've included a few journaling prompts. If you find them helpful, use them. If not, write from your heart in whatever way is most helpful to you.

THE PRACTICE OF SABBATH



SABBATH, GOD'S GIFT TO US, IS A TIME SET APART TO REST FROM WORK, WORSHIP GOD, TEND TO OUR SOUL, AND BLESS OTHERS.

The idea of sabbath may sound complicated, unrealistic, inconvenient, or counterproductive. It may seem like it's only really accessible to people who are superspiritual and have more time and fewer financial worries.

But here's the good news: **Sabbath is a beautiful, life-giving gift from the God who loves us.**

In many ways, keeping sabbath is about restoring all of who we are and becoming aligned with all of who God is. As Jesus said to his first followers:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

In restoring us, the Spirit also works through our sabbath practices to realign our relationships, our values, and our priorities.

Developing a new sabbath practice can be a deeply rewarding experience. Because our personalities and circumstances are unique, there is no one-size-fits-all sabbath pattern, and sabbath practices can change through seasons and stages of life. God invites all of us to explore a mix of worship, rest, recreation, and sabbath-making activities that both restore and realign us.



Lectio divina

See page 10 for tips on how to practice *lectio divina*.

- Exodus 20:8-11: Sabbath rest is a gift from God.
- Mark 2:23-28: The sabbath is made for you.
- Luke 6:6-11: The sabbath is a day for healing.



Journaling or thought prompts

- What does it mean to “keep the sabbath holy”?
- How might practicing sabbath help me become more like Jesus?
- How could my sabbath practices be life-giving for my neighbors?



Ideas for practicing sabbath rest

- Use your sabbath time to **refresh and recharge**. Do things that give you life and point you to God, rather than things that drain you and move you away from God. Gather with God’s people for worship; enjoy God’s creation; connect with family, friends, and neighbors.

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- **Turn off technology** and invite God to speak to your heart in the quiet. Pray the words of the hymn “Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak” (Frances R. Havergal) to invite God into every aspect of your life.
- **Put the past week to rest** with this segment of a night prayer from the *New Zealand Prayer Book*: “What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.”
- **Weave micro-sabbaths into your days.** As often as you can, stop what you’re doing and repeat this “breath prayer” from Psalm 62 until you can feel yourself relaxing into God’s love:
(*Breathe in*) Yes, my soul,
(*Breathe out*) find rest in God.
- You’ll find **additional sabbath practice ideas** for individuals, groups, and families at crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject/Sabbath.



How I might practice sabbath:

NURTURE YOUR FAITH WITH



FAITH PRACTICES



Faith practices are repeated actions that help us grow in our love for God and our neighbor, listen to the Holy Spirit, and become more like Jesus.

Also called "spiritual disciplines," these practices have helped Christians throughout the centuries draw closer to God. They're holy habits that help God's Word and God's character sink deep into us.

Start your journey into a new, life-giving way to nurture your faith with the twelve practices explored in this book:

- Sabbath
- Gratitude
- Generosity
- Hospitality
- Engaging Scripture
- Justice and mercy
- Listening
- Celebrating
- Prayer
- Wonder
- Remembering
- Service

For more on faith practices, visit crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject



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