



The Evangelical Covenant Church

STREAMS & PATHWAYS

An Exploration of
Spiritual Practices

For more information, visit us online at
CovChurch.org/discipleship/prayer/retreats



Copyright ©2009 The Evangelical Covenant Church.
A Make and Deepen Disciples resource
Permission to reproduce (with credits) granted to all Covenant churches.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, Today's New International[®] Version TNIV[®].
Copyright ©2001, 2005 by International Bible Society[®]. Used by permission of International Bible Society[®].
All rights reserved worldwide.

Website: CovChurch.org
For information: mdd@covchurch.org
To download more copies: CovChurch.org/resources

Streams & Pathways

QUICK GLANCE

Day One1

Introduction: Isaiah 43:18-21

Scripture Experience: John 4:1-42—Jesus, the Living Water; Small Group Reflection;
Prayer of Examen; Journaling

Day Two, Morning3

Practice #1—Group Lectio—Isaiah 43:18-21; Share and Pray

Practice #2—Parable Walk

Practice #3—Rule of Life/GROW

Day Two, Afternoon6

Other Practices (Individual Lectio Divina; Praying with Icons/Art; Art as Prayer; Silence/Solitude)

Rule of Life, Part 2

Small Groups

Spiritual Friendships

Accountability Partners/Groups

Spiritual Practices Resources 10

Prayer of Examen

Lectio Divina

Parable Walk

Praying Scripture

Affirmation Postcard

Praying with Art

Art as Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Silence and Solitude

Framing a Moment

Journal

Bibliography

Streams & Pathways

DAY ONE

Introduction

- 1) What brought you here?
- 2) What do you hope to get out of this time together?

Isaiah 43:18-21

- ¹⁸“Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.
²⁰The wild animals honor me,
the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,
²¹the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise.

Scripture Experience

John 4:1-42—Jesus, the Living Water

³So Jesus left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. ⁴Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob

had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” ¹³Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” ¹⁶He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

¹⁷“I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you

have no husband. ¹⁸The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."
²¹"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

²⁵The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." ²⁶Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

²⁷Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"

Small Group Reflection

Imaginative Prayer

Choose one of the stories of Jesus. Read it through once to get your bearings. Read it again slowly, lingering over each line. Take it all in.

- Make yourself comfortable.
- Take some deep breaths and turn your intentions toward God.

- Ask God to lead you to the living water he has for you in this passage.
- Read the text slowly, lingering over each line. Take it all in.
- Close your eyes and open your imagination.
- Notice the setting.
- What do you see?
- What do you hear?
- What can you taste, touch, smell?
- Who are the people in the scene?
- What are they doing? What are they saying?
- What can you tell by the looks on their faces?
- Where are you in this scene?
- What are you doing?
- What are you saying?
- What are people saying to you?
- What emotions are you experiencing?
- When the story is over, what do you do?
- Do you stay or move on?
- Do you tell someone of your experience?

Journaling

What meaning does this story have for you now? Look back over your time of prayer and notice what went on. What feelings do you attach to the experience? Notice when you felt consoled or desolate. Were there other feelings that emerged? Learning to pay attention to the feelings can help you more easily attend to the leading of the Spirit in your life.

Streams & Pathways

DAY TWO, MORNING

Practice #1, Group Lectio

Centering/Relaxation exercise: sit comfortably, breathe deeply, relax body, acknowledge and release distractions, invite God's presence.

Read the passage (1 or 2 times): Stop when a word or phrase intrigues or attracts you. Is there a particular word that impresses you?

Bring your senses to the text: Allow a few minutes of silence.

Read the passage again: Listen carefully in order to discover how this passage touches your life today. What does it mean? What is God trying to say? Allow another few minutes of silence.

Read the passage once more: Listen to discover the invitation. What is God calling me to do or be today or this week? Be aware of resistance. Open your heart and will to whatever God is calling you to do or be. Allow a further few minutes of silence and response to God.

Isaiah 43:18-21

¹⁸"Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.

¹⁹See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland.

²⁰The wild animals honor me,
the jackals and the owls,
because I provide water in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland,
to give drink to my people, my chosen,
²¹the people I formed for myself
that they may proclaim my praise.

Share and Pray

Practice #2, Parable Walk

If you spend time in the Gospels, which tell us about Jesus and his life and teaching, you will notice that he spent a lot of time walking from village to village, from event to event. As he went, people often joined him. They gathered to hear him speak, and he used those times to teach his friends about the Kingdom of God, about his Father, and about themselves. He often did this by pointing out something in their surroundings that might illustrate a truth he was trying to share with them. "The Kingdom of God is like this..., And it is like this, too..." Seeds falling on different kinds of soil, lamps hidden under baskets, a lost sheep, a found coin...

We know that God continues to speak to us and teach us today, as His Spirit opens our

hearts and minds to Scripture. That same Spirit of Jesus Christ may also teach us as we are “on the journey,” going about the day’s activities. One way you can listen for the Master’s voice today is to go on a parable walk. A parable walk is time spent slowly walking with Jesus, prayerfully noticing your surroundings. Acknowledge that Jesus is there right beside you. Ask Jesus to teach you along the way. When something catches your attention, stop and ask God what he has for you there. Linger long, and let God’s often quiet voice tell you the secrets of the Kingdom, and his lessons for your life. When you sense God speaking to your heart, you may want to stop and write down a record of your time with him. Spend as much time at any particular spot as you feel you need. When you feel ready to move on, do so. Ask Jesus again to lead you, to teach you, to speak to you. Let this be your time with Jesus—resist the urge to go with other people, and allow God to speak to you personally.

Here’s an example: Perhaps you stop to look at a melting snow bank. Really look at what’s before you. Engage not just your sight, but your other senses as well. What do you see, hear, taste, touch and feel in your heart? What lesson might God be teaching you about your life right now, through what you’re experiencing around you?

This kind of prayer requires time to quiet your spirit and for your heart to begin to listen, so give yourself no less than a half hour. Using closer to a full hour may be very helpful for you. When you are done, please respect the silence of those around you, and plan to meet at the prescribed time and location. Please take a few moments to capture in writing what you have taken from this experience, before the lessons are lost in the activity of the day. May God richly bless your time with Him!

GROW

- *God's word*—Bible study, Lectio Divina, praying the scriptures...
- *Relationships*—spending time with spiritual companions, giving time to relationships with family, friends, spiritual conversations...
- *Obedient Living*—serving in a mission related capacity, serving your family and loved ones, tithing...
- *Worship*—corporate worship, prayer, meditation, writing/journaling, art...

What practices do you do?

Weekly: _____

Monthly: _____

Seasonally: _____

Annually: _____

Streams & Pathways

DAY TWO, AFTERNOON

Other Practices

Individual Lectio Divina

The importance of time, place, and preparation.

The Four Moments:

- *Lectio*—slowly read the passage several times.
- *Meditatio*—Reflect on the passage, gravitating to any particular phrase or word that seems to be of particular import.
- *Oratio*—Respond to the passage by opening one's heart to God in prayer.
- *Contemplatio*—Listen to God.

Praying with Icons/Art

- 1) Pray for God's guidance as you prepare to connect with God.
- 2) Find a comfortable space to reflect on the icon or work of art. Clear your mind and the space of distractions and spend a fair amount of time with the image.
- 3) As you gaze at the icon allow God to speak to you and direct your thoughts.
- 4) End your time with a prayer of gratitude for God's presence and his presence in the image.

- 5) Reflect on this experience for a few minutes and examine how you were able to enter into God's presence by way of the image.

Art as Prayer

Any medium will do and do not be afraid of this practice because you believe yourself lacking in artistic talent!

- 1) Place your art supplies on the table in front of you.
- 2) Settle yourself and clear your mind of distractions. Breathe deeply several times to help clear your mind; with each breath imagine God's love and creativity flowing over you.
- 3) Focus on a question or feeling that you have taken into your prayer life recently. Write out this question or feeling as a clear intent of the focus of this prayer time; you will want to keep this in front of you during the prayer time. An example could be, "I intend to explore my feelings about _____ during this time." You may write this on your drawing or painting paper or on something else.
- 4) Once you have settled on a question or feeling to focus on, quiet your mind once again and allow your imagination to start forming an image that addresses your intention for this time. Be patient and try

Spiritual Friendships

The intent of a Spiritual Friendship should be to help encourage each of you in your walk with God. Spiritual Friendships involve a safe environment where each party can openly share about their walk with God and receive support, encouragement, prayer. Each person in the friendship should be growing in their faith through this process. Jesus set the example for this model in his ministry; although he had the 12 disciples with him there were times that he called on a select few to share in both the high and low points of his ministry. Peter, James, and John were with him at the transfiguration as well as the Garden of Gethsemane. Spiritual Friendships help us celebrate our joys and work through our difficult times. To be in a Spiritual Friendship you need to be vulnerable with the other person and allow them to enter your faith journey while at the same time you must be willing to do the same for another person; each party has to be willing to give and receive in the relationship if it is going to serve as a benefit to either person.

Process

- 1) Spend some time reflecting on the friends you currently have in your life; look back over your life and think about the friends that have been transformational in your life at specific stages of your development.
- 2) List the attributes of what would make a good Spiritual Friend.
- 3) List the attributes that you see in yourself as a friend.
 - a) Reflect on the list of your attributes and see if there are any limitations you have to being a friend, this could include physical, emotional, time, etc.

- b) Are you willing to work on your limitations to facilitate the process of forming a Spiritual Friendship?
- 4) Talk to someone about developing a Spiritual Friendship; this need not be a new friendship, it can be someone you are already friends with.

Accountability Partners/ Groups

Accountability Partners/Groups are intended to help us stay faithful on our journey with God. These are a good way to give a regular and honest account of how you are doing with your faith journey. In this setting it forces you to examine your choices, priorities, and actions and evaluate how these align with the will of God. The goal of these groups is not to punish you or to make you feel guilty about your sin; rather, it is intended to encourage you to be faithful as you follow God. Failures and temptations are a part of our journey, having an accountability group can help us through these difficult times and encourage us to remain faithful. We can not do this on our own, we were created to be in community and this is one way to live in community and hold each other accountable on the journey of following God. Joining an Accountability Group will require you to be vulnerable and honest when you are asked the hard questions and it will require you to be willing to ask the hard questions of other members of the group. It is recommended that these groups remain relatively small and can be as small as two people; whatever size you and the other people are comfortable with should dictate the size of the group.

Process

- 1) If you are at a place in your faith journey where you desire an Accountability Partner/ Group spend, some time praying for God to guide you to a person or group.
- 2) As a group, decide how often you will meet. It should be clearly stated that whatever is discussed in the group setting remains confidential; there must be a level of trust if members of the group are going to be sharing personal struggles.
- 3) Start with telling your story, areas that each of you struggle with, and areas where you are looking for growth.
- 4) Based on what you learn from each other about areas of struggle and temptation as well as areas of desired growth it may be helpful to develop a list of questions you will ask each other each time you meet.

These questions could include:

- a) How have you done with _____ in the last week?
 - b) Have you seen improvement in _____ since we last met?
 - c) Are there any new struggles that have arisen that you would like to address?
- 5) Make sure that your time is focused on helping each other grow in your spiritual lives, each time you get together spend some time in prayer for each other.
 - 6) For this to be beneficial all members of the group must be willing to be open and honest and be willing to ask the hard questions; it is easy to avoid the tough questions and the tough answers, but if members of the group wish to grow they need to be willing to meet this challenge.

Spiritual Practices Resources

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Instructions

- 1) Choose a segment of time to consider. It could be a few hours, a day or a week. Some people use examen to prayerfully look back on a year or more of their lives... We are going to look at the last day starting with this morning...(or the last 24 hours depending on the start time of the retreat).
- 2) Get quiet and know that God is with you.
- 3) Look back at the day like you might watch a movie of your life. Start at the beginning and let the time roll by. Notice the people you came in contact with. Notice your feelings, moods and your reactions.
- 4) First notice the gifts hidden in your day. Give thanks.
- 5) Next ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight and the courage to look honestly at your life, to guide you to what is important and the wisdom to understand what God wants to show you.
- 6) Notice the times you felt most alive. Notice when you felt the life drain out of you. Where did you sense a closeness of God's presence with you? Where were you drawn to God today? Were there times in which God seemed distant or removed? Were there times during the day in which you

experienced peace? Were there times that you experienced a lack of peace?

- 7) End this time of prayer by looking forward to a tomorrow that will be filled with God. Ask God to help you to see him more clearly and to follow him as you are led.

Psalms for Prayer of Examen

Step 1: Get centered and quiet— Psalm 46: 10-11

¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress

Step 2: Be grateful for the gifts of the day—Psalm 103: 1-5

¹Praise the LORD, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

²Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—

³who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,

⁴who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,

⁵who satisfies your desires with good things

so that your youth is renewed
like the eagle's.

***Step 3: Prepare to look at your day
with God—Psalm 43: 3-4***

³Send me your light and your faithful care,
let them lead me;
let them bring me to your holy mountain,
to the place where you dwell.

⁴Then I will go to the altar of God,
to God, my joy and my delight.
I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.

***Step 4: Look at the day with
God—Psalm 139: 23-24***

²³Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

***Step 5: Come before God for
forgiveness and healing—
Psalm 51:1-19***

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.

²Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

⁵Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time
my mother conceived me.

⁶Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguilt, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing
of your righteousness.

¹⁵Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice,
or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

¹⁸May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹Then you will delight
in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar

***Step 6: Look forward to the day
ahead—Psalm 17:15***

¹⁵As for me, I will be vindicated
and will see your face;
when I awake, I will be satisfied
with seeing your likeness.

Spiritual Practices Resources

LECTIO DIVINA

Preparation

Centering/relaxation exercise: sit comfortably, breathe deeply, relax body, acknowledge and release distractions, invite God's presence.

Lectio Divina

- 1) *Read the passage (1 or 2 times).* Stop when a word or phrase stops you, becomes vibrant or attracts you. Is there a word or image that impresses you?
- 2) *Bring your senses to the text.* Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence.
- 3) *Read the passage again.* Listen to discover how this passage touches your life today. What does it mean? What is God trying to say? Do not try to force a meaning. Stay open. This is a time of reflection, involving thinking, feeling, and/or intuition. Allow for 1-2 minutes of silence.

- 4) *Read the passage once more.* Listen to discover the invitation. What is God calling me to do or be today or this week? Be aware of resistance. Open your heart and will to the action that may be called for. Allow for 2-3 minutes of silence and response to God.

Journal and pray

Take time to express what you have heard from God. In a group, share aloud the word, image, or invitation received. Pray for God to help the person next to you respond to the invitation or word received.

Spiritual Practices Resources

PARABLE WALK

If you spend time in the Gospels, which tell us about Jesus and his life and teaching, you will notice that he spent a lot of time walking from village to village, from event to event. As he went, people often joined him. They gathered to hear him speak, and he used those times to teach his friends about the Kingdom of God, about his Father, and about themselves. He often did this by pointing out something in their surroundings that might illustrate a truth he was trying to share with them. “The Kingdom of God is like this.... And it is like this, too...” Seeds falling on different kinds of soil, lamps hidden under baskets, a lost sheep, a found coin...

We know that God continues to speak to us and teach us today, as His Spirit opens our hearts and minds to Scripture. That same Spirit of Jesus Christ may also teach us as we are “on the journey,” going about the day’s activities. One way you can listen for the Master’s voice today is to go on a parable walk. A parable walk is time spent slowly walking with Jesus, prayerfully noticing your surroundings. Acknowledge that Jesus is there right beside you. Ask Jesus to teach you along the way. When something catches your attention, stop and ask God what he has for you there. Linger long, and let God’s often quiet voice tell you the secrets of the Kingdom, and his lessons

for your life. When you sense God speaking to your heart, you may want to stop and write down a record of your time with him. Spend as much time at any particular spot as you feel you need. When you feel ready to move on, do so. Ask Jesus again to lead you, to teach you, to speak to you. Let this be your time with Jesus—resist the urge to go with other people, and allow God to speak to you personally.

Here’s an example: Perhaps you stop to look at a melting snow bank. Really look at what is before you. Engage not just your sight, but your other senses as well. What do you see, hear, taste, touch and feel in your heart? What lesson might God be teaching you about your life right now through what you’re experiencing around you?

This kind of prayer requires time to quiet your spirit and for your heart to begin to listen, so give yourself no less than a half hour. Using closer to a full hour may be very helpful for you. When you are done, please respect the silence of those around you, and plan to meet at the prescribed time and location. Please take a few moments to capture in writing what you have taken from this experience, before the lessons are lost in the activity of the day. May God richly bless your time with Him!

Spiritual Practices Resources

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Introduction

Praying Scripture is a conversational, devotional approach to God's Word. When approaching Scripture in this way, you are not merely reading the words to grasp the content; you are allowing God's Word to guide a prayerful conversation with Him. You listen for God's message to you and stay alert to how your heart may be prompted to respond to God.

Getting Started

- 1) Prayerfully choose a Psalm or another scripture to which you feel drawn.
- 2) Spend some moments quieting yourself, finding a place of quiet at your core.
- 3) Read through the passage once or twice. Gently notice the little tugs, the words that got your attention, the images and memories that were evoked, the people that came to mind.
- 4) Begin rewriting the passage. Insert your own conversation with God. Change words to fit your prayer, your situation. Spend time, muse, talk back and forth. Let come whatever seems to come.

- 5) When you feel like your time is complete, read over what you wrote one more time and give thanks to a God who not only hears our prayer, but who initiates and bids us respond.

Examples—Old Testament

Psalm 18

(New Living Translation, modified)

- ¹I love you, LORD;
you are my strength.
- ²[Oh] LORD, [you are] my rock,
my fortress, and my savior;
[you are] my rock,
in whom I find protection.
[You are] my shield,
the power that saves me,
and my place of safety.
- ³I called on [you, oh] LORD,
[you] who [are] worthy of praise,
and [you] saved me from my enemies.

Psalm 57

(New Living Translation, modified)

- ¹Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy!
I look to you for protection.
I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings
until the danger passes by.

²I cry out to [you, for you are] God Most High,
[I cry out] to [you, oh] God
[because you] will fulfill
[your] purpose for me.

³[You] will send help from heaven to rescue me,
disgracing those who hound me.

Examples—New Testament

Many New Testament gospel and epistle passages also provide guidance for this kind of prayer, particularly as the passage invites response.

Matthew 6:25-27

(New Living Translation, modified)

²⁵[Lord Jesus, you taught your disciples and you teach me, saying:] “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are?

²⁷Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”

Response: “Jesus, forgive me for the many times I have worried in the past week. So many times, I’ve gotten caught up in the day-to-day details of the material side of life. Thank you for calling my attention to the birds, and for reminding me of your love for me. Help me to quit worrying (it doesn’t help, anyway!) and to serve you joyfully and faithfully.”

Philippians 1:9-11

(New Living Translation, modified)

⁹[Lord Jesus,] I pray that [by the work of your Spirit in my life, [my] love will overflow more and more, and that [by your grace I] will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding.

¹⁰For I want...to understand what really matters, so that [I] may live [a] pure and blameless [life] until the day of [your] return. ¹¹[Again, by the work of your Spirit,] may [I] always be filled with the fruit of [my] salvation—the righteous character produced in [my] life by [you,] Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God [and that is my heart’s desire].

Spiritual Practices Resources

AFFIRMATION POSTCARDS

“He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.”—2 Corinthians 1:4, NLT

We are all brothers and sisters in Christ and we are called to be in community together. In your community, I am sure that you can think of a few people who are working endless hours and are in “thank-less” professions, a stay-at-home mom, a nurse, a social worker, a pastor/youth pastor, a mailman, a trash collector...and the list goes on (but you get the idea).

Take a few minutes and read in silence 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and listen for whom God may lay on your heart. Take a few moments to pray for the person as you write the card. Write that person a letter of encouragement and affirm them on the postcards provided. This can include thanks for what they are doing, how you see them furthering the kingdom of God, and how they are serving others. Let that person know that how they choose to spend their time truly matters. Address the postcard and send it out when you get home.

Spiritual Practices Resources

PRAYING WITH ART

Introduction

These classic images, have for centuries been windows into which we can see God more clearly or explore a different facet of who God is. These images are an invitation to interact with God in a different way. Some questions you may want to ask as you peer through this window might be: what about this image surprises me, what could I understand more about the message or what is God conveying to me in this image... in other words, what is God's message?

There are sacred images that have been a part of Christianity for centuries. The images that are captured are designed to turn your attention to God and his good works. Art can be seen as a window to the unseen God; by focusing on them and praying with these images in mind it focuses our prayer on God. There are many works of art to choose from.

Process

- 1) Pray for God's guidance.
- 2) Find a comfortable place to sit and reflect on the art you have chosen. Choose a piece that sticks out to you and grabs your attention. Clear your mind and space of distractions and spend a fair amount of time reflecting at the sacred art– about 20 minutes is suggested, but the time is up to you to decide.
- 3) As you reflect on the sacred art allow God to speak to you and direct your thoughts. Allow God to speak to you through this image but do not be anxious about how or when God will speak to you. Simply sit and gaze at the image and connect with God.
- 4) End your time with a prayer of gratitude for God's presence.
- 5) Reflect on this experience for a few minutes and examine how you were able to enter into the presence of God by way of this sacred art. It may be helpful to write down your reflections in a journal.

Spiritual Practices Resources

ART AS PRAYER

Introduction

Creating works of art through painting, drawing, sculpting, crafting, or other forms of visual art can be illuminating. Creating visual art can stir our soul in ways that other forms of prayer might not and connect us to God in a new way. Please do not avoid this practice because you do not think you have any artistic talent; this practice can be useful for prayer regardless of your artistic ability. The intent of this practice is to explore your feelings in prayer through visual artwork.

- Photography
- Collage
- Paint
- Clay

For the electives "Paint" and "Clay":

- Read Psalm 66: 16-20
- Read Isaiah 64: 8 (for clay potters)

Process

- 1) Place your art supplies on the table in front of you.
- 2) Clear your mind of distractions. Breathe deeply several times to help clear your mind; with each breath imagine God's love and creativity flowing over you.

- 3) Focus on a question or feeling that you have taken into your prayer life recently. Write out this question or feeling as a clear intent of the focus of this prayer time; you will want to keep this in front of you during the prayer time. An example could be, "I intend to explore my feelings about _____ during this time." You may write this on your drawing or painting paper or on something else.
- 4) Once you have settled on a question or feeling to focus on, quiet your mind once again and allow your imagination to start forming an image that addresses your intention of this time. Be patient and try not to force an image to appear. If you are having trouble forming an image, acknowledge your feelings to God and invite an image to appear. If you need to get up and walk around for a bit feel free to do so.
- 5) Draw, paint, sculpt, or otherwise craft a representation of the image that appeared to you. Do not be caught up in the process; allow your heart to guide you through this process, refrain from being critical of your work in this process. Allow your artwork to represent what your intent was for this time.

6) Reflect on what you have created. Are you surprised at your work? How did this visualization come to you? Where did you feel God's presence the most? Where did you feel most distant from God?

7) Close with a prayer of gratitude for the many ways God is present with us in prayer.

Spiritual Practices Resources

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

When we think about God's name, we perhaps most often think of the word "God." But the Old and New Testaments record hundreds of ways of referring to God, including many ways that reflect God's character, actions and attributes: our provider, our shelter, my rock, my savior...

One way to "hallow" God's name, or honor it as holy, is to reflect on how the various titles and descriptions for God shed light on God's identity and character. Take a moment and write out two or three names of God on separate slips of paper. Select names that are particularly meaningful to you at this time—names that reflect your thankfulness for who God is and for what God does.

As you add your strips of paper to the board, thank God using those names you have chosen.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...

Imagine how perfectly, how completely God's will is done in heaven. When we pray for God's

kingdom to come and for God's will to be perfectly done, we're asking for something monumentally earth-shaking.

God invites us to be bold in our petitions as we ask God to move and to act and to usher in justice and righteousness.

In the journal provided, prayerfully write your requests to God. Remember that when we ask for God's will to be done, we should start with asking for a make-over of our own lives. We can also be bold in interceding on behalf of other people, that God would do mighty things in their lives, for their good and for God's glory. You may choose to use initials in the interest of privacy.

Cry out to God on behalf of those people and causes you know to be close to God's heart.

Give us this day our daily bread...

How often do we come to this part of the Lord's Prayer and realize we've already had "our daily bread"? But this line of prayer reminds us of three things:

- When we pray "give us our daily bread," we ask not only on behalf of ourselves, but also on behalf of God's children around the world

- God wants us to be in prayer daily, in daily reliance on Him
- God cares about our most basic needs

In silent prayer, come before your loving, heavenly Father, asking whatever is on your heart.

Know that God longs to hear the requests of His children, and trust that He will respond out of love and wisdom, rather than according to any request that may be unintentionally self-focused or short-sighted.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us...

After teaching his disciples how to pray, Jesus centered on this one line for further explanation, saying: "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15)

We have full confidence that "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

We know also that as forgiven people, we need to be willing to forgive others. The Lord's Prayer reminds us that receiving forgiveness and offering forgiveness go hand in hand.

Select two stones. On one, write something representing that for which you seek God's forgiveness. On the other, write something representing some hurt, affront or grudge which you choose to let go in a spirit of genuine forgiveness, by God's grace. Prayerfully, drop both stones in the bucket provided, symbolizing both your own cleansing and your release of some debt owed to you.

Thank God for His forgiveness and for giving you the ability to forgive others.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...

We may tend to hide it, but most of us are keenly aware of those things most likely to tempt us, and those areas in which we are most likely to fall.

Prayerfully consider the week ahead, asking God to help you be honest about places, activities and situations to avoid. Although God promises not to allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, we can also be smart about not leading ourselves into temptation. For situations that can't be avoided, we can confess our weakness to God and acknowledge our total reliance on Him to avoid failure.

Write on a card that thing most likely to trip you up in the week ahead. Asking God to deliver you from the evil of succumbing to sin, and to keep you out of temptation's path, tear up the card and place it in the bin provided.

It's been said that in heaven, we will no longer have the opportunity to honor God by resisting sin, since we won't have any desire to sin. As you leave, ask God to strengthen you by His Spirit so that any temptation you face this week is turned on its head and results in obedience that glorifies God.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

"Amen" literally means, "So be it!" Close this time in silent prayer before God, again asking that God's will be done just as God would choose, in your own life and in the lives of

those around you.

Acknowledge before God that the kingdom He is ushering in on earth is 100 percent God's kingdom, that all the power necessary to answer all of your prayers belongs to God, and that any glory due anyone belongs to God.

Thank God for hearing your prayers and for blessing your time with Him today. Ask for the gift of faith to wait upon God as He answers.

Using the strips of paper provided, write down two or three things for which you are particularly thankful today. Acknowledge before God that these are good gifts from God's hand and not simply the rewards of your own hard work.

In a spirit of thanksgiving, add the strips to the board. Amen.

Spiritual Practices Resources

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Introduction

Entering into prayer in silence is a way to practice attending and listening to God without interruption or distraction. The desire is to free yourself from the distractions of noise so you can be totally present to God; placing yourself in the presence of God without the distraction of words, music, reading, or anything else audible. Simply come before God in quietness and allow God's presence to flow over you.

Process

- 1) Find a place that is quiet and where you will not be interrupted.
- 2) Set a desired amount of time to spend in silence, for the beginner 10 minutes is a reasonable place to start. You may want to set a timer so that you are not tempted to stare at the clock for the entire time.
- 3) Clear your mind of thoughts and simply be silent before God. When thoughts come into your mind do not focus on them, allow them to pass by and return to silence.
- 4) After your allotted time has passed, reflect on the experience of what it was like to simply be in the intentional presence of God in silence.
- 5) You may want to do this several times a day if the time increments you chose are short. Others may choose to go on solitude retreats where a day or more is spent in silence.

Spiritual Practices Resources

FRAMING A MOMENT

Introduction

Our lives are made up of moments—ordinary and extraordinary moments—that speak of God’s presence with us. However, we are often inattentive and miss them or don’t give them a second thought. Poets, artists, composers, writers, and contemplatives invite us to pay attention and notice what is right in front of us: the sleeping child, the way the sun is caught in the water as it sprays from the faucet, the katydid that rests on the twig, the lonely look in the face of the stranger, the lump in the throat, the tear in the eye.

One way to pay closer attention and capture those moments is to use the ancient Japanese poetry form called Haiku. Frederick Buechner likens the exercise of writing haiku to framing a moment. He says that the frame makes us stop and take notice.

Haiku is a three-lined poem with a syllable pattern of five, seven, five. The first and last lines contain five syllables; all the words that fit in between must be contained in seven syllables whether in one or two lines.

The discipline of reducing an experience to very few words requires that we stand still and enter into it. It invites us to look with lover’s eyes at the beauty and radiance of the moment

whether painful or joyful. As we paint the picture with few words we reverence the Presence in our lives.

- 1) Begin with prayer. Look into your heart’s archives. Let memories roll by like pictures on a movie screen. When a memory appears that takes hold of you, stop! Put a frame around that memory. Stand back and gaze at it. Savor it. Take a walk. Have a coffee break. Find a chapel or some sacred spot, and sit in reflection. Choose whatever works for you. All this is preparation. It is also prayer. When you feel you have spent sufficient time musing over this memory, settle down in one of your favorite holy places with your notebook and begin writing your haiku.
- 2) After writing your first haiku, let the memories roll again. Perhaps you will want to write a second and third. As you create your haiku, try to capture different emotions: joy, sadness, delight, disappointment, satisfaction, awareness...
- 3) If it is helpful for you, share your creations with a friend.

A few examples from Basho and Macrina:

*An old silent pond.
Into the pond a frog jumps.
Splash! Silence again.*

*A tiny gold leaf
Offers a silent sermon
From a barren branch.*

*Fear is in my heart
Buttercups console me
In my healing field.*

Try it yourself

One definition of “contemplation” is “to take a long, loving look at the real.” It is taking the time to notice or pay attention to something. That look is long, unhurried, leisurely and nonjudgmental. It has the gaze of a lover or an

artist, looking for the singular, concrete particular details that sets her/his subject apart from all others. It isn’t general or abstract. And what is looked for is the real, the truth, not the ideal or a fictionalized, cleaned-up illusion.

One way to practice contemplation, meditation, prayer is to look at something that catches your attention, perhaps a moment, a conversation, a slice of creation, or a person, and then reduce it to just a few words required of haiku. Give it a try. Write several around one subject and see what emerges. And know that whenever you turn your heart toward God you are communing with him. You are at prayer.

Spiritual Practices Resources

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) ISBN 0060628391. *Celebration of Discipline* explores the “classic disciplines,” or central spiritual practices, of the Christian faith. Along the way, Foster shows that it is only by and through these practices that the true path to spiritual growth can be found. Dividing the disciplines into three movements of the Spirit, he shows how each of these areas contributes to a more balanced spiritual life. The inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study offer avenues of personal examination and change. The outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service help prepare us to make the world a better place. The corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration bring us nearer to one another and to God.

The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self, by M. Robert, Jr. Mulholland (InterVarsity, 2006) ISBN 978-0830832774. If the goal of the Christian journey is Christlikeness, then you must reckon with the unhealthy ways that you root your sense of being in things other than God. Along the way, you will discover a growing sense of intimacy and abandonment to God. Not only will you encounter the joy of discovering your own self, you will also find a greater love for others and compassion for the world.

The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul-Tending for Youth Ministry, by Kenda Creasy Dean, Ron Foster (Upper Room) ISBN 0-8358-0858-0. The authors offer a lively spiritual primer and practical guide for those who pastor young people. Dean and Foster rechart a course for youth ministry through the classical spiritual disciplines of the church. The book identifies families, congregations, and mentor relationships as the “holy ground” where young people are most likely to say “Yes!” to God.

Grow Deeper in Christ: An Introduction to Spiritual Practices, by Katie Isaza (Department of Christian Formation, ECC, 2008) www.covenantbookstore.com. Based on the belief that growth in Christ needs to be nurtured through regular spiritual practices, this small group guide was created to facilitate the shared experience of eight formative spiritual practices, also known as spiritual disciplines. Through Bible study, discussion, shared experiences, personal reflection, and practice, this guide will allow you to make these spiritual disciplines part of your journey towards growth in Christ.

Growing Deeper Tools (Department of Christian Formation, ECC, 2008). A series of fourteen practical tools for use by individuals, families, or groups. Based on the belief that growth in Christ needs to be nurtured through regular

spiritual practices, these tools offer a variety of practices from which to choose.

Available at www.covchurch.org/resource.

Titles include:

- #1 *Reading the Bible*
- #2 *Praying Scripture*
- #3 *Telling Your Story*
- #4 *Praying Your Community*
- #5 *Reviewing Your Day*
- #6 *Walking with God*
- #7 *Making Commitments*
- #8 *Keeping a Spiritual Journal*
- #9 *Becoming Spiritual Companions*
- #10 *Mentoring Children*
- #11 *Developing Racial Righteousness*
- #12 *Choosing to Give*
- #13 *Worshipping with Children*
- #14 *Using a Rule of Life*

Journaling as a Spiritual Practice: Encountering God Through Attentive Writing, by Helen Harmelink Cepero (InterVarsity, 2008) ISBN 0830835199. Whether you are a longtime journal keeper or someone who has never kept a journal at all, this book will help you go below the surface of your life with God. It is not about the art of writing, but about how journaling can form us spiritually. Every chapter combines descriptive text, illustrations from journals and the author's own experience with journaling practices integrated along the way to help you bring your own life and world into sharper focus.

The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People, by John Ortberg (Zondervan, 2002) ISBN 0310250749. The heart of Christianity is transformation—a relationship with God that impacts not just our “spiritual lives,” but every aspect of living. With a new chapter on prayer and added discussion questions, this expanded edition offers modern

perspectives on the ancient path of the spiritual disciplines. This is a road map toward true transformation that starts not with the individual but with the object of the journey—Jesus Christ. (Complete Groupware Kit is also available and includes: Leader's Guide, Participant's Guide, hardcover book edition, video in both VHS & DVD formats. All items except video also sold separately.)

Sacred Pathways, by Gary L. Thomas (Zondervan, 2001) ISBN 0310242843. This book unfolds nine distinct spiritual temperaments—their traits, strengths, and pitfalls. In one or more, you will see yourself and the ways you most naturally express your relationship with Jesus Christ. Whatever temperament or blend of temperaments best describes you, know that it's by the design of a Creator who knew what he was doing when he made you according to his own unique specifications. Sacred Pathways will show you the route you were made to travel, marked by growth and filled with the riches of a close walk with God.

Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation, by Ruth Haley Barton (InterVarsity, 2006) ISBN 0830833331. Spiritual disciplines are activities that open us to God's transforming love and the changes that only God can bring about in our lives. Picking up on the monastic tradition of creating a “rule of life” that allows for regular space for the practice of the spiritual disciplines, this book takes you more deeply into understanding seven key disciplines along with practical ideas for weaving them into everyday life. Each chapter includes exercises to help you begin the practices—individually and in a group context. The final chapter puts it all together in a way that will help you arrange your life for spiritual transformation.

Savoring God's Word: Cultivating the Soul-Transforming Practice of Scripture Meditation, by Jan Johnson (NavPress, 2004) ISBN 1576833992. God has an incredibly rich life waiting for us, but it does not come unless we have an interactive life with God in which we talk to God in prayer and listen to God—especially in Scripture.

Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation, by M. Robert, Jr. Mulholland (The Upper Room, 2001) ISBN 0835809366. This book explores the role that scripture plays in spiritual formation. Mulholland examines obstacles often encountered in spiritual reading and introduces a new approach to reading that will enliven the scriptures. He compares informational reading (reading to be informed) with formational reading (reading to be spiritually formed). Readers are released to God's initiative, allowing the scripture to form a spiritual life inside them.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life, by Marjorie Thompson (Westminster John Knox, 2005) ISBN 0664229476. Offering a framework for understanding spiritual disciplines and instruction for developing and nurturing those practices, *Soul Feast* is a favorite for individual reflection and group study.

Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry, by Tony Jones (Zondervan, 2003) ISBN 031025101X. This is a comprehensive primer on the study and use of spiritual and contemplative practices for the benefit of your teenagers—and especially your own soul. Disciplines include: Sacred Reading, The Jesus Prayer, The Ignatian Examen, The Daily Office, Stations of the Cross, Sabbath, Silence and Solitude, Centering Prayer, Spiritual Direction, The Labyrinth, Pilgrimage Service.

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives, by Dallas Willard (HarperOne, 1990) ISBN 0060694424. The author reveals how the key to self-transformation resides in the practice of the spiritual disciplines, and how their practice affirms human life to the fullest. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* is for everyone who strives to be a disciple of Jesus in thought and action as well as intention.

Spiritual Disciplines, by Stephen Eyre (Zondervan, 1992) ISBN 0310547512. A six-session introduction to six key disciplines such as prayer, meditation, fellowship, and worship that add power and depth to our lives as Christians.

Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies, by Janet L. Johnson (InterVarsity, 2003). This series of six Bible study guides covers the disciplines of community and submission, prayer and listening, reflection and confession, service and secrecy, simplicity and fasting, solitude and silence, study and meditation, worship and celebration.

Community & Submission, ISBN 0-8308-2092-2
Prayer & Listening, ISBN 0830820957
Reflection & Confession, ISBN 0-8308-2093-0
Service & Secrecy, ISBN 0-8308-2096-5
Simplicity & Fasting, ISBN 0-8308-2094-9
Solitude & Silence, ISBN 0830820973
Study & Meditation, ISBN 0830820914
Worship & Celebration, ISBN 0830820981

Spiritual Disciplines Companion: Bible Studies and Practices to Transform Your Soul (Spiritual Disciplines Bible Studies), by Jan Johnson (InterVarsity, 2009) ISBN 0830835237. Spiritual disciplines connect us to the God who wants to transform our souls. We discover these time-tested practices in the Bible as we look at the everyday ways Jesus related to God. These companion studies and exercises will help you

to explore sixteen core practices. Three segments on each practice (a total of forty-eight sessions) allow space to go beyond superficial understanding and to begin to live in a new way.

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us, by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun (InterVarsity, 2005) ISBN 0830833307. The author gives us directions for our journey toward intimacy with Christ. While the word discipline may make us want to run and hide, the author shows how desires and discipline work together to lead us to the transformation we're longing for—the transformation only Christ can bring. Instead of just giving information about spiritual disciplines, this Handbook is full of practical, accessible guidance that helps you actually do them.

Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens, by Dorothy Bass and Don C. Richter (The Upper Room) ISBN 0-8358-0975-7. Find out how Alexx dealt with all his stuff, how Marie expressed her creativity with a paint roller, what Jack learned about play. These are just a few of the Christian practices this team of writers explores. Some ancient Christian practices turn up as ways to deepen awareness of God's presence in our lives today. Discover how to use your imagination when reading the Bible—à la Saint Ignatius—and practice tuning in to God like Brother Lawrence of the 17th century.

This bibliography was prepared by the staff of the Covenant Resource Center. While not specifically endorsed by the Evangelical Covenant Church, the above resources may be helpful as you plan for ministry. For additional assistance or suggestions, contact the Covenant Resource Center at 1-800-338-IDEA(4332) or resource.center@covchurch.org.