

## Daily Spiritual Practices

### DAY I: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Daniel 1:3 - 5, 8

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility - young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

#### Devotional

King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies conquered Jerusalem and carried off most of the city's inhabitants as slaves. One of those taken was a young teenager named Daniel. Babylon had one simple goal: to eliminate Daniel's distinctiveness as a follower of God and absorb him into the values of their culture - and their gods. How did Daniel resist the enormous power of Babylon? He was not a cloistered monk living behind walls. He had heavy job responsibilities and many people giving him orders. He had a minimal support system and, I imagine, a very long to-do list each day. Daniel also had a plan, a "Rule of Life" He did not leave the development of his interior life to chance. He knew what he was up against. While we know little of the specifics, it is clear that he oriented his entire life around loving God. He renounced certain activities, such as eating the king's food (Daniel 1), and engaged in others, such as the Daily Office (Daniel 6). Daniel somehow managed to feed himself spiritually, and he blossomed into an extraordinary man of God - despite his hostile environment."

#### Question to Consider

What is your plan, in the midst of your busy day, for not leaving the nurturing of your interior life with God to chance?

#### Prayer

Lord, I just need to be with you - for a long time. I can see that there are a lot of things in me that need to change. Show me one small step I can take today to begin to build a life around you. Lord, help me to develop an effective plan in my life for paying attention to you whether I am working, resting, studying, or praying. In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

### DAY 1: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 73:12 - 17, 25

This is what the wicked are like -

always carefree, they increase in wealth.

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure:

in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued;

I have been punished every morning.

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"

I would have betrayed this generation to your children.

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me

till I entered the sanctuary of God;

then I understood their final destiny.

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. (NIV 1984)

Devotional

Christianity is not a set of intellectual beliefs, but a love relationship with God. We need to do what the psalmist did in Psalm 73 - go into the sanctuary of God and be alone with him. This especially applies when we are in the midst of suffering and darkness. The sayings of the Desert Fathers come from men and women who fled to the desert as a sanctuary to seek God with their whole heart. Eventually, they formed communities around a "Rule of Life. The following are a few of the teachings they left behind. Read them slowly and prayerfully. (A "cell" was an ancient term for a quiet, private place to be with God.) Abba Anthony said.... "just as fish die if they stay too long out of water, so the monks who loiter outside their cells or pass their time with men of the world lose the intensity of inner peace. So like a fish going towards the sea, we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay outside we will lose our interior watchfulness." Abbot Pastor said: "Any trial, whatever that comes to you, can be conquered by silence." A certain brother went to Abbot Moses in Scete, and asked him for a good word. And the elder said to him: "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.

Question to Consider

How and why do you think finding time alone with God in silence might "teach you everything"?

Prayer

Lord, you know how easily and quickly I lose my interior sense of you. Grant me grace for the rest of today to silence the exterior noises around me so that I would hear the warmth of your voice. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 2: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Acts 2:42 - 47

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Devotional

My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing - by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father. What activities did Jesus practice? Such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God's Word and God's ways, and service to others. Some of these will certainly be even more necessary to us than they were to him, because of our greater or different need... So, if we wish to follow Christ - and to walk in the easy yoke with him - we will have to accept his overall way of life as our way of life totally. Then, and only then, we may reasonably expect to know by experience how easy is the yoke and how light the burden.

- Dallas Willard

Question to Consider

What spoke to you when you read about the lifestyle of the early Christians in Acts and the way they sought to follow the life of Jesus?

Prayer

Lord, you say your yoke is easy and your burden is light (Matthew 11:30), yet the life I live often feels hard and heavy to me. Show me the activities, decisions, priorities, and relationships that are not what you want for me today. I submit my life to your lordship and ways this day. In your name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 2: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 63:1 -5

You, God, are my God, and earnestly I seek you;

I thirst for you, my soul

my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched 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,  
Vid, and in your name I will lift up my hands.  
I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

#### Devotional

Gregory of Nyssa, the great bishop and theologian of the fourth century, argued that there exists in us a ceaseless yearning for God's infinite beauty and splendor. He wrote: "We are led to God by desire. We are drawn upwards towards Him as if by a rope." When the soul glimpses the beauty of God, it yearns to see more. His writings are filled with images describing our longing for God: a lover asking for another kiss, a person tasting a sweetness that can only be satisfied by another taste, the dizziness one experiences standing at the edge of a precipice as one peers into a vast space. Gregory compares the contemplation of God to a person looking at a spring that bubbles up from the earth: As you came near the spring you would marvel, seeing that the water was endless, as it constantly gushed up and poured forth. Yet you could never say that you had seen all the water. How could you see what was still hidden in the bosom of the earth? Hence no matter how long you might stay at the spring, you would always be beginning to see the water... It is the same with one who fixes his gaze on the infinite beauty of God. It is constantly being discovered anew, and it is always seen as something new and strange in comparison with what the mind has already understood. And as God continues to reveal himself, man continues to wonder; and he never exhausts his desire to see more, since what he is waiting for is always more magnificent, more divine, than all that he has already seen.?

#### Question to Consider

Where can you find the time in your week to "gaze on the infinite beauty of God"?

#### Prayer

Lord, grant me an even richer glimpse of your infinite beauty and loveliness this day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

#### DAY 3: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:16 - 22

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. (NIV 1984)

#### Devotional

Fire - What makes a fire burn is space between the logs, a breathing space. Too much of a good thing, too many logs packed in too tight can douse the flames almost as surely as a pail of water would. So building fires requires attention to the spaces in between, as much as to the wood. When we are able to build open spaces in the same way we have learned to pile on the logs, then we can come to see how it is fuel, and absence of the fuel together, that make fire possible.

#### Question to Consider

What difference might it make if you were to practice? Quotation marks "building open spaces" and quotation marks into your life?

#### Prayer

Lord, I need breathing space. I have too much going on in my life, too many logs on the fire. Show me the way to create space in my life, and may the fire of your presence burn in and through me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

#### DAY 3: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 27:3 - 4

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.  
One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.  
and to seek him in his temple.

#### Devotional

'The most striking thing about this psalm is what David does when he finds himself besieged by armies and enemies eager to kill both him and his family. He does not ask for victory or wisdom or changed circumstances. Instead, David gets quiet to seek God, to dwell with him, and to reflect upon his beauty. Each of us needs an opportunity to be alone and silent, or even, indeed, to find space in the day or in the week, just to reflect and to listen to the voice of God that speaks deep within us....In fact, our search for God is only our response to his search for us. He knocks at our door, but for many people, their lives are too preoccupied for them to be able to hear.- Cardinal Basil Hume

#### Question to Consider

In what ways might God be searching for you today - knocking at the door of your life?

## Prayer

Lord, a part of me so longs to be alone with you. Another part of me wants to run and avoid time with you at all costs. Thank you for this opportunity today to stop and listen to you. Thank you for continuing to knock at my door - especially when I am too anxious or distant to hear you. Grant to me, I pray, a heart like David's - one that genuinely longs for you above all else in this life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## DAY 4: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 119:27 - 32

Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, mic that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds. My soul is weary with sorrow;  
strengthen me according to your word.

Keep me from deceitful ways;

be gracious to me and teach me your law.

To have chosen the way of faithfulness;

I have set my heart on your laws.

I hold fast to your statutes, LORD; do not let me be put to shame.

I run in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.

do not let me be put to shame.

Turn in the path of your commands, for you have broadened my understanding.

## Devotional

The most famous "Rule of Life" in the Western world is the Rule of St. Benedict, written in the sixth century. In a nonstop, distracted world like ours, a "Rule of Life" brings balance and simplicity, inviting us to a life which seeks everything in proper measure: work, prayer, solitude, and relationships. Benedict begins his Rule with a call to listen and an invitation to surrender to God: Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.... Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord's service... Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.

## Question to Consider

What would it look like for you to "run on the path of God's commandments"?

## Prayer

Lord, you know my world can be nonstop and complex. Help me to balance the demands coming at me today, remembering you while I work, and keeping you at the center of all I do. In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

## DAY 4: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:1 - 6

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

## Devotional

St. Patrick (AD 389-461), originally from Britain and raised a Christian, was sold into slavery in Ireland for six years. Upon his escape, he became an ordained bishop and returned to Ireland, traveling widely, evangelizing tirelessly, and organizing churches and monasteries. His mission to Ireland marked an important turning point in the history of missions in the Roman Empire.

Prayer of Saint Patrick

I arise today

Through God's strength to pilot me;

God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me,

God's ear to hear me,

God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's hosts to save me From snares of the devil, From temptations of vices,

From every one who desires me ill,

Afar and anear,

Alone or in a multitude...

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ on my right, Christ on my left,

Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,

Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me.

I arise today

on Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through a confession of the Oneness Of the Creator of creation.

Question to Consider

Which lines from Patrick's prayer speak to you? Carry them in your heart today.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your reassuring presence that surrounds me.

This is almost too wonderful for me to take in! By the Holy Spirit, enlarge my capacity to remain aware of your presence throughout the remainder of this day. In Jesus name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

DAY 5: MORNING/MIDDAY OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:14 - 17

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father" The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are Gods children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Devotional

Jesus constantly addressed the Almighty, eternal, infinite Yahweh as "Abba," an intimate, warm, familiar word a child would use - nor unlike "Daddy? The heart of the gospel is that Jesus gives his disciples the authority to address God as Father. Through Jesus, we too are Abba's child. Contemplative spirituality moves us along toward a more mature relationship with God. We progress from the "give me, give me, give me" attitude of a small child to a more mature way of relating with God in which we delight in being with him as our "Abba Father." The progression of this movement can be broken down as follows:

- . Talking at God: This is simply parroting what our parents or authorities told us to pray. For example, "Bless me, Lord, for these thy gifts, which we are about to receive through Christ our Lord, amen."
- Talking to God: We become more comfortable finding our own words to speak to God, rather than using the readymade prayers of our childhoods. For example, "Give me, give me, give me more, O God."
- Listening to God: At this point we begin to listen to God, and we begin to enjoy a two-way relationship with him.
- Being with God: Finally, we simply enjoy being in the presence of God - who loves us. This is far more important than any particular activity we might do with him. His presence makes all of life fulfilling



### Question to Consider

What fears are you carrying that you can release to your Abba Father today?

### Prayer

Lord, I believe that living a life in your presence is what makes all of life fulfilling. I am just not sure how to get to that point in my spiritual walk. I want to grow beyond a "give me, give me" relationship with you. Fill me with the Holy Spirit so that I might learn to enjoy being with you and stop simply going to you for your gifts and blessings. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

### DAY 5: MIDDAY/EVENING OFFICE

Silence and Stillness before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading: 1 John 4:7 - 12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

### Devotional

God has a different path for each of us. My closing prayer for you is that you would be faithful to your own path. It is a tragedy to live someone else's life. I know; I did it for years. I would like to end our time together with a story about Carlo Carletto. He lived among Muslims in North Africa for ten years with the Little Brothers of Jesus community. He wrote about how one day, he was traveling by camel in the Sahara desert and came upon about fifty men laboring in the hot sun, trying to repair road. When Carlo offered them water, to his surprise, he saw his friend Paul, another member of his Christian community. Paul had been an engineer in Paris - working on the atom bomb for France. God had called him to leave everything and become a Little Brother in North Africa. At one point, Paul's mother came to Carlo and asked for help understanding her son's life. "I have made him an engineer," she said. "Why can't he work as an intellectual in the church? Wouldn't that be more useful? Paul was content to pray and to disappear for Christ in the Sahara desert. Carlo then went on to ask himself: "What is my part in the great evangelizing work of the Church?" He answered his own question as follows:

I understood that my place, too, was there, amid the ragged poor, mixing in the mob.

Others in the church would have the task of evangelizing, building, feeding, preaching. The Lord asked me to be a poor man among the poor, a worker among workers..

It's so difficult to judge!.. But to one truth we must always cling desperately - to love!

It's love which justifies our actions; love must initiate all we do. Love is the fulfillment of the law.

If, out of love, Brother Paul has chosen to die on a desert track, by this he is justified.

If, out of love, [others] built schools and hospitals, by this they were justified. If, out of love, Thomas Aquinas spent his life among books, by this he was justified...I can only say, "Live love, let love invade you. It will never fail to teach you what you must do."

Question to Consider

What might it look like for God's love to invade and fill you, guiding you to what you "must do"?

Prayer

Lord, I can see that there are a lot of things in me that need to change. Let your love invade me. Give me the courage to faithfully follow your unique path for my life - regardless of where it might lead, and regardless of the changes you want to make in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)