



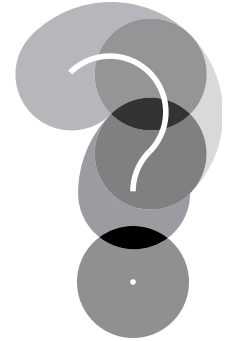
Practicing the Practice



at Home

WHAT IS PRACTICING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ABOUT?

To practice something implies an attempt to develop a habit, acquire or master a skill. But rather than transforming someone into a master faster or expert prayer warrior, what is transformed through engaging in spiritual practices is one's relationship with God through Christ. Just as Jesus welcomed his first disciples to "come and see," subsequent disciples over the centuries who accept Jesus' invitation have developed and are developing spiritual disciplines that help them follow and be more like Christ and draw near to God.



FAST: FOR FOOD SECURITY

Food security impacts millions of children in the United States. If your household is food-secure, commit to fasting from eating out or purchasing non-essential items to help others who face food insecurity. Donate the money that would have gone to those purchases to an organization that fights hunger. Some ideas:

- Set a specific start and end date for your family's fast.
- Forego eating dessert and other treats.
- Keep a money jar on your dining room table. Each time a household member fasts from such a purchase, place the amount of money that purchase would have cost in the jar. When the fasting period ends, donate that money.
- Before eating, pray for those who are hungry. Follow with a minute of silence as a reminder that there are many today who experience empty plates and stomachs.

FAST: IN COMMUNITY

Consider communities around you that regularly fast together, who you know who may be part of these communities, and what events your family can attend to experience and/or learn more about fasting. Possible connections to explore:

- Your pastor's or youth pastor's relationships with local faith leaders
- Your child's friends and their families who may fast as part of their faith practices
- Community events related to the Christian Lenten season
- Community events connected to the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and the connected Iftar "breaking fast" communal meals
- Community events connected to the Jewish practice of fasting on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)

- Partner to plan, fast, and compare notes
- A small group or family group

PRAY: YOUR FAMILY'S TABLE GRACE

Large sheet of paper, markers or crayons

Begin your family mealtimes with your own table grace. As a family, write words to a familiar tune, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," or the "Doxology." Count the syllables in each line and write words to match each line's syllable count. Using markers or crayons, write and decorate your table grace on a sheet of paper. Hang it where you and guests sharing a meal with you can easily see it and join in your thanksgiving for the meal.

LISTEN TO GOD: FIELD TRIPS

Journals; pencils, pens, and/or markers

Gather the family and conduct listening field trips in different environments. Explore each environment, move around and sit in silence, write and/or draw art in response to what you hear and experience. Discover what environments each family member connects with most. Discuss your experiences after each field trip. Possible explorations:

- Neighborhood park, forest preserve, mountain hike, beach walk, or anywhere in nature
- Many church sanctuaries are open throughout the week for the public to enter and pray
- Sculpture garden, Japanese garden, and/or human-made meditative spaces like labyrinths
- Aquarium or zoo

EMBRACE SIMPLICITY: AN UNSCHEDULED DAY

Shuttling between school, extracurricular activities, and meetings? Declutter the family calendar. For one day, clear your household's schedule.



Enjoy time together as a family. Let each family member choose something to do this day. Stay local. If possible, walk or bike to places. Try it again another time. Make observations together how the family feels about this time.

EMBRACE SIMPLICITY: GIVING AWAY

Have everyone choose one item each day for a week that you can give away to the appropriate recipients, such as a shelter, library, food bank, or school.

As a family, commit to giving away something you own when you receive a gift. Consider incorporating this practice during your birthdays.

UNPLUG: DINNER TABLE PHONE BOOTH

Shoebox, art supplies

Commit to not using electronic devices during family mealtimes. As a family, create a “phone booth” to hold cell phones and handheld video game consoles during mealtimes. Decorate a shoebox with the art supplies and place the finished phone booth in the middle of the dining table.

TRY A NEW SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: CREATION COLLABORATION

Brainstorm ways your family can engage your five senses to draw near to God. Work together to create something new that reflects God’s Spirit in and around you. You could try:

- Responding to a psalm by creating a chalk mural on your driveway or sidewalk.
- Gathering nature items on an outdoor walk to use in an art mural.
- Choreographing a dance to a worship song.
- Trying a new recipe and delivering the food to neighbors.

TRY A NEW SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE: A TEMPORAL LABYRINTH

Leaves, stones, or sidewalk chalk; outdoor open space; internet-connected device

Walking the labyrinth is an ancient spiritual discipline pre-dating Christ’s ministry on earth. People

from all walks of life and from various faith traditions have walked the labyrinth as part of their spiritual practices. Do an internet search for “labyrinth design” and choose a simple pattern. Create a labyrinth in an outdoor space, such as your yard, a park, or an unused parking lot. Use fallen leaves, rocks, or other nature items to create the labyrinth lines. Alternatively, use sidewalk chalk on concrete or asphalt. When completed, walk the labyrinth. Begin at the entrance, follow the path to the center, pause, then turn around and follow the path back until you exit the labyrinth. Invite others to enjoy the labyrinth.

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

- ➔ Spiritual practices help us grow our relationship with Jesus. Think of your closest friends. How did you become friends with them? Describe what has contributed to those friendships growing. What connections can you make between those relationships and how you might engage in your relationship with Jesus?
- ➔ As a family, what are some spiritual practices we do or used to do? What spiritual practices might we want to try together? Are there spiritual practices that we specifically do or could start doing during a particular time of the year or holiday?
- ➔ Are there spiritual practices your friends or neighbors practice that we can learn more about as a family? What do you already know about these practices? What questions do you have about these practices? What websites or places can we visit to learn more?
- ➔ What do you think Mother Teresa’s quotation means and how might you apply it in your life? “The more you have, the more free you are.”
- ➔ Are there any places you have been where you feel closer to God? Where are they? What about these places do you think helps you feel close to God?
- ➔ Are there any art forms that help you draw near to God? Is it music (singing, instrumental)? Is it painting, photography, dancing, or something else? What is something we can do as a family to engage in this art form together?



PRAYER

Lord, as we spend time with you, may we continue to be transformed by you. Amen.