

A Guide
to Spiritual
Rhythms

BE THE GARDENER OF MY SOUL

Spirit of the living God, be the Gardener of my Soul. For so long I have been waiting, silent and still—experiencing a winter of the soul. But now, in the strong name of Jesus Christ, I dare to ask:

Clear away the dead growth of the past,
Break up the hard clods of custom and routine,
Stir in the rich compost of vision and challenge,
Bury deep in my soul the implanted Word,
Cultivate and water and tend my heart,
Until new life buds and opens and flowers.
Amen.



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INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS

“The goal of the Christian life is not so much a set of behaviors as it is an orientation of the soul toward God and His kingdom.”

— Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

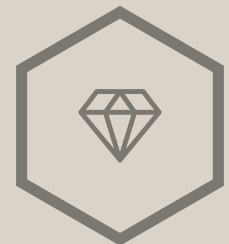
As Christ followers, our desire is to become more and more like the one we follow. Becoming like Christ always takes radical intentionality.



Just like many other areas of life, without intentionality and planning our spiritual health can become lopsided or weak. This series will provide an opportunity for you to access your spiritual health and take intentional steps toward strengthening areas of weakness.



No matter what your current spiritual need, God has graciously given us spiritual rhythms to help us encounter Him in deeper and more intimate ways. The goal of any spiritual rhythm is a deeper and more intimate connection with Jesus Christ our Lord, not the practice itself.



God has given these practices as a means by which He can transform you. His transformation of you happens through a deeper relationship with Himself. Your role in this relationship is simply to place yourself before Him so that He can transform you.

PRACTICE HIS WAYS

As a church, we will discuss the following seven spiritual practices or rhythms. This is not an exhaustive list of practices nor is it in order of importance. Some of these rhythms will propel you forward and some will help you get back on track. While we will be engaging in these rhythms together, the status of your spiritual health is between you and God. Think of this series as individual work you get to share with others.

WEEK 1

MEDITATION

A slowing down in order to give undivided attention to God

WEEK 2

PRAYER

A pattern for communicating with God in every part of the day

WEEK 3

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

A removing of noise in order to hear God's voice

WEEK 4

FASTING

A self-denial of normal necessities in order to seek God on matters of deep concern

WEEK 5

SABBATH

A regular day set aside for worship and rest

WEEK 6

CONFESSION

A surrender of weaknesses and faults so transformation can occur

WEEK 7

SIMPLICITY

A loosening of attachments to focus on what really matters

GETTING STARTED

You may be saying to yourself, "OK, I'm in! Give me the list. What do I do?" Well, that's the tricky part. Rhythms are not a to-do list you check off. Humans have a tendency to turn beneficial lists and other good practices into laws. Rhythms aren't laws and if you try to make them into laws, they will not produce the relational connection God intended.

doing noun

do·ing | \ \ 'dü-ıŋ \

Definition of *doing*

1: the act of performing or executing : ACTION

apprentice noun

ap·pren·tice | \ ə-'pren-təs \

Definition of *apprentice*

1: one who is learning by practical experience under skilled workers

rhythm noun

\ 'ri-t_həm \

Definition of *rhythm*

1: an ordered recurrent alternation of strong and weak elements

SPIRITUAL DOING

Our desire to become like Christ can easily turn into spiritual "doing." When this happens, we give attention to perfecting spiritual tasks. These tasks could include anything from Bible reading and memorization to giving and helping others. When we find ourselves in this spot, growth is defined by how well we execute the tasks. The better we are at completing the practices the closer we feel to God.

"We are not seeking to be faithful to some system of practices, but to a personal, interactive, conversational relationship with our heavenly Father."

— Unknown

SPIRITUAL APPRENTICESHIP

Instead of a set of tasks to accomplish, consider these practices part of a mentorship program. You are placing yourself under Jesus Christ in an attempt to learn from Him all you can about life and holiness through practical experience. This practical experience occurs daily as you engage in spiritual practices.

"Through our partnership with the Holy Spirit in these disciplines, God masters us and leads us deeper into His own heart of love."

— Richard Foster

SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS

Spiritual rhythm is created when we choose practices that come naturally to us and avoiding those that do not. In this guide we will call the practices we have a natural inclination toward our upstream practices and those we have a natural aversion to our downstream practices. A natural aversion should not be taken as a pass for any specific practice; in fact, it is often these downstream practices that impact our spiritual growth the most. Upstream and downstream practices are different for every person and our apprenticeship journey needs to include both.

"This is no one size fits all program - just the invitation to recognize where God is at work and calling you deeper into himself."

— Aj Sherrill

"[The spiritual life] demands time, space and a capacity for attention."

— John Mark Comer

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Assess the status of your current spiritual health.

- On the next page you will find a personal assessment to help determine your current spiritual state
- Use this to know what areas you may consider strong or weak

Engage in the weekly rhythm.

- Each week you will find a summary and a suggestion for the weekly practice
- Use the baseline suggestion regularly during the week

Notice how God's moving in your everyday activities and share this with your group.

- This guide is for you and Jesus first. It is for you and your group second
- Use the questions in each rhythm to share with your group what you are learning about you and your apprenticeship

Discern which spiritual rhythms are vital to your spiritual growth.

- Determine if these 7 rhythms are upstream or downstream practices
- Use what you discover to set an intention for your spiritual growth this year

"The life that is pleasing to God is not a series of religious duties. We have only one thing to do, namely, to experience a life of relationship and intimacy with God."

— Richard Foster

SPIRITUAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT*

Before beginning any of the spiritual rhythms take a few minutes to evaluate your current spiritual health. Read each of the following questions and mark your response as indicated below. Take time to notice your desires, inclinations, and resistance. When you have finished marking your responses, consider which practices could line up with the areas you desire to grow in. Remember spiritual rhythms consist of regular engagement with both upstream and downstream practices.

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

- 1 = not true,
- 2 = needs improvement,
- 3 = most of the time,
- 4 = consistently true.

Choose 4 or 5 categories for which you feel a deep or passionate desire, regardless of your response. Put a check in the Desire column.

Am I celebrating the love and glory of God?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am aware of God's presence in my life, confident of His love for me and intentionally celebrate our connection					
Worshiping with fellow believers gives me a deep sense of joy and God's presence.					
I take time to celebrate God and acknowledge my limits by deeply entering into a weekly sabbath day that is different from every other day.					
When people, experiences, and work are more important than God, I am aware of it.					
I am a joyful, thankful person who expresses gratitude to God and others easily and often.					

*Assessment adapted from Adele Calhoun's work in Spiritual Disciplines Handbook.

Am I opening myself up to God in deeper ways?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I regularly and intentionally make space in my life for prayerfully listening to God at home, at work and with others.					
I can admit my mistakes, weaknesses, and growth areas to God as well as others.					
I enjoy time spent alone with God in quiet reflection.					
I am self-aware. I notice my feelings, body, losses, needs, and limits.					
I don't need to be doing something for God or others in order to feel good about myself.					

Am I growing in self-awareness and authenticity?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am not in denial about my sin and blind spots and how they hurt others.					
I easily apologize to others, ask forgiveness and live in the freedom of Christ.					
I can let go of busyness, noise, and digital availability to spend time alone with God in silence and solitude.					
I recognize the voice and activity of the Holy Spirit in my life.					
I recognize my addictions and compulsions, and am committed to living free of them.					

Am I connecting with God and others?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I have a relationship with someone who helps me grow in my spiritual walk.					
I feel comfortable opening my home, my heart, my faith, and my life to people not in my family.					
I am not judgmental, oppositional or contentious toward others. I deal with my anger in constructive ways.					
Others describe me as honest, vulnerable, open, and approachable.					
I am not hypersensitive and not easily offended. I give and receive love freely and easily.					

Am I cultivating my knowledge of God?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I am growing in Biblical literacy and know how scriptural truth intersects with my life.					
I know how to recognize God's voice as I read Scripture.					
I regularly take time to be nourished by God's Word.					
The Bible is alive and interesting to me					
I have a plan for reading Scripture.					

Am I contributing to the growth of Christ's kingdom?	1	2	3	4	Desire
I work for justice and have a heart for the dispossessed and needy that is visible to others.					
I am just and fair in dealing with others. I honor my contracts and commitments, even if they inconvenience me.					
I know my gifts and contribute them to the kingdom of God. I am more concerned about building God's kingdom than my own.					
I willingly set aside my agenda in order to share my possessions, skills, and time with others.					
The fruit of the Spirit is more and more evident in my life.					
People with problems, needs, sorrows, and losses seek me out. They know I care.					

Am I attending to God's activity in my life?	1	2	3	4	Desire
It's easy for me to get around to prayer.					
My prayer life is not mostly about myself and my needs.					
I am able to authentically pray my emotions, losses, anger, doubts, and desires. I feel comfortable telling God all the "good, bad and ugly" in me.					
I am comfortable praying aloud with others.					
I am aware of how God speaks to me and I know how to listen to God and recognize His voice.					

MEDITATION

“Just as moving a prism reveals different bands of color, meditation allows God to shine His truth and light into our hearts.” — Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

“Do not let this Book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” (Joshua 1:8)

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

SYNOPSIS:

The aim of meditation is to become present with God. This presence is difficult for our minds to attain. Our minds are tangential, naturally following what shows up from one association to the next. As we train our minds to attend to the present, aided by breathing and body posture, we help curb distractions and teach our minds to attend to God.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When meditation becomes part of your daily rhythm you can see some of the following fruit. You will experience a depth of insight. You will develop a love for gazing on God. You will experience calmness, serenity, and quietness stemming from an awareness of the nearness of God. You will have a new sight for the interior things of God in the natural and external world.

EXAMPLES:

During your meditation rhythm this week try one of the following options. Choose a passage of Scripture and spend time ruminating over it and its application. Spend time in creation noticing the details and creativity it took to make. Pay attention to God with your body by slowing down, relaxing, and breathing deeply. Meditate on how Jesus is revealed through the Scripture.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If meditation is new for you we recommend trying with the following practice this week. Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place. Sit in a position that you can maintain without effort or attention. Place yourself in the presence of God. Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord. Ask Him to open your heart to His Word. When your mind wanders, gently bring it back and continue your meditation. Try reading Psalm 139, Psalm 86, or Psalm 42.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current meditation rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm in your daily life?

2

The first step into meditation involves creating an environment of silence, but learning to listen is also facilitated by learning to practice God's presence throughout the day. What are some things you do that help you live in greater awareness of God's presence?

3

What would you need to do to create a space for meditation in your home?

4

What is your plan for practicing meditation this week? Be as specific as possible.

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would meditation be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is your gut reaction to the word meditation?

How would you characterize your ability to pay attention?

When do you find it easiest to focus your mind or heart?

How might the tendency to do everything quickly affect your ability to meditate?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

PRAYER

"Men and women are at their noblest and best when they are on their knees before God in prayer... To pray is not only to be truly godly; it is also to be truly human." — John Stott

"Prayer is not primarily saying words or thinking thoughts. It is, rather, a stance. It's a way of living in the Presence." — Richard Rohr

"To intercede for another means that in our prayer we stand between-or next to - them and God." — Brian C. Taylor

SYNOPSIS:

Prayer is a posture of your heart and attitude where you are expecting to hear God speak with you. It is both talking with the Creator of the universe and listening to Him. Adding a rhythm of prayer to your life provides a pattern for attending to God throughout the day.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When prayer becomes part of your daily rhythm, you can see some of the following fruit. Prayer develops a deeper relationship with God as He delights in communicating with us. Prayer also expresses our dependency and trust in God. It ultimately aligns our hearts with the heart of God and builds up our faith. We are able to grow and develop because we are in union with God.

EXAMPLES:

Prayer can happen in many different ways. Try one of the following examples this week to expand your prayer rhythm. **Breath prayer:** repeat simple one-sentence prayer that begins with a biblical name of God that is meaningful to you; follow the name with a word or phrase expressing your deep God-given desire; connect the prayer to your breathing and return to it throughout the day. **Fixed-hour prayer:** Stop at the top of every hour and spend a few minutes in prayer. **Listening prayer:** Notice when a song or reading grabs at your heart; don't move on; listen for what God is saying at that moment and respond.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If prayer is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week. Intentionally come into the presence of God. Become quiet and attentive. As people or places come to mind, picture bringing them to Jesus. Does Jesus say anything to you about these people? When you have brought everyone to Jesus, leave them with Him. Tell Jesus your intent is to leave these people in His care rather than look after them on your own. Throughout the day, return in your mind to the comfort that these people are with Jesus.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current prayer rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm in your daily life?

2

The first step into prayer involves creating an environment of silence but learning to listen is also facilitated by learning to practice God's presence throughout the day. What are some things you do that help you live in greater awareness of God's presence?

3

What would you need to do to create a space for prayer rhythm in your home?

4

What is your plan for practicing prayer this week? Be as specific as possible.

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would prayer be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How do you practice Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing?

What do your requests to God reveal about your priorities, goals, desires, and heart?

How do you remind yourself throughout the day that there is more to life than work, tasks, and transactions?

How do you feel about memorized prayers or using the prayers of others?

What is the experience of praying with others like for you?

What makes a prayer authentic?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

"We are so afraid of silence that we chase ourselves from one event to the next in order not to have to spend a moment alone with ourselves, in order not to have to look at ourselves in the mirror."
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"In a noise-polluted world, it is even difficult to hear ourselves think let alone try to be still and know God. Yet it seems essential for our spiritual life to seek some silence, no matter how busy we may be. Silence is not to be shunned as empty space, but to be befriended as fertile ground for intimacy with God." — Susan Muto

SYNOPSIS:

Silence and Solitude are two distinct rhythms that often go hand in hand. Solitude is a state of mind and heart. In this stance, we intentionally remove ourselves, not merely to experience rest and refreshment from God, but to better hear and engage with His voice. Solitude could also be considered a "container discipline." It is in this scheduled, uninterrupted, distraction-free environment that we can practice other disciplines.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When Silence and Solitude become regular rhythms, some of the God-given fruit includes rest and renewal. God also provides freedom from constant stimulation and noise. There is liberation from negative habits of speech and a life oriented toward the opinion of others. You may find yourself quieting the internal noise, growing in self-awareness, having a deeper intimacy with God, and developing better listening skills.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythms of Silence and Solitude consider incorporating some of the following options. Choose to exercise or commute without listening to music, a podcast, or an audiobook. Schedule a retreat for just you and God; go somewhere on purpose without the company of another and spend time in silence with God. Set up a regular period of time where you choose not to speak or choose not to have noise or stimulation.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If Silence and Solitude are not regular rhythms for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week. While doing a task, choose to turn off any background noise and continue the task by offering it to God. Be in the present, doing what you are doing with a listening heart. Pay attention to how you respond to this. What is it like for you? What distracts you?

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current Silence and Solitude rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance these rhythms in your daily life?

2

Creating a rhythm of Silence and Solitude can help us thrive in the chaos of our society. Where are moments in your day that you could seize little moments of solitude?

3

What would you need to do to create a rhythm of Silence and Solitude in your life?

4

What is your plan for practicing Silence and Solitude this week? Be as specific as possible.

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would silence and solitude be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What are your initial reactions to the idea of being alone or silent?

When have you felt most comfortable being alone? Most uncomfortable?

How do you avoid or resist silence? What do you fill it with? What does this mean?

What tends to pop into your mind when you are alone?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

FASTING

"Fasting reveals the things that control us...We are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the Word of God. Fasting is feasting!" — Richard J. Foster

"Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and some others have utterly disregarded it." — John Wesley

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting...But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your faces, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." — Matthew 6:16-18

SYNOPSIS:

Richard Foster defined fasting as "the voluntary denial of otherwise normal functioning for the sake of intense spiritual activity." When we intentionally place ourselves in the position of physical emptiness there is an opportunity for conversation with God about these cravings and attachments. Ultimately these cravings and attachments that arise would push us toward an awareness of our need for Jesus alone to fill and satisfy.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When fasting becomes a regular rhythm, some of the God-given fruit includes identifying and fellowshiping with Jesus by choosing to follow His sacrificial example. More time is freed up for prayer and we specifically pray for needs in the body of Christ. We begin to seek God's strength for obedient love and service and repent of self-indulgent, addictive, or compulsive behaviors.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythm of fasting consider incorporating some of the following options. Abstain from purchasing morning coffee or daily soda. Offer the money or time to God. Select a time frame and abstained from sugar or caffeine. Begin a fast after supper. Fast until supper the next day.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If fasting is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week. Fast one meal a week. Spend your mealtime in prayer. When you feel hungry, sit with Jesus in the wilderness and feed on the bread of heaven. Talk to Jesus about what His self-denial means to you.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1 What is your current fasting rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm?

2 Creating a rhythm of fasting can illuminate what controls us and our need for God. Make a list of attachments that may be holding you back from wholehearted service to God. Talk with God about this list. Come back to it at the end of the week and see if there are any new insights gained after your practice of fasting this week.

3 What would you need to do to create a rhythm of fasting in your life?

4 What is your plan for practicing fasting this week? Be as specific as possible.

- Downstream**
A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.
- Upstream**
Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would fasting be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How does Christian fasting differ from a hunger strike and fasting for health?

What is your attitude toward fasting or self-denial?

How do you determine when to fast?

When you feel empty or restless, what do you do to try to fill the emptiness? What does this tell you about your heart?

What are the benefits of not publicizing our intention to fast? Are some of these more practical than spiritual? Are there some spiritual benefits, too?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

SABBATH

“Sabbath is not primarily about us or how it benefits us; it is about God, and how God forms us. It is not, in the first place, about what we do or don’t do; it is about God – completing and resting and blessing and sanctifying. These are all things that we don’t know much about... But it does mean stopping and being quiet long enough to see – open-mouthed – with wonder – resurrection wonder... Our souls are formed by what we cannot work up or take charge of. We respond and enter into what the resurrection of Jesus continues to do.”
— Eugene Peterson

The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body. . . Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength. . . It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. — Charles Spurgeon

SYNOPSIS:

God instituted the Sabbath so that we would rest and reflect on who He is and what He is doing. God knows we need times of rest and reflection on a daily and weekly basis. Sabbath rhythms provide a space to delight in the goodness and beauty of God while also recalibrating our bodies and mind to align with Him. We physically align our priorities to the reality of His kingdom. As we rest in this reality, we demonstrate a lavish trust not only in the sovereignty of our Creator but in His ability to manage and care for our daily/weekly pressures.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When sabbath becomes a regular rhythm, some of the God-given fruit includes delighting in all good gifts of creation like meals, seasons, and your family. There is a freedom that allows for acknowledgment of our human limits and the ability to live within them. You may begin to notice the overlooked gifts around you and cultivate gratitude. Slowing to a deliberate stop may help you honor the way God created and allow for healthier living of an intentionally rested life.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythm of sabbath, consider incorporating some of the following options. Practice restful activities one day a week like walking, picnics, a Sunday afternoon nap, a phone visit with someone you love, tea or coffee with a friend, family time, game with your kids, love-making. Let go of things that stress you out for 24 hours. Don’t create a to-do list for Sunday. Create a sabbath box. This is where you can place the things you don’t need to take with you into your sabbath day. This could include cell phones, credit cards, other gadgets, work projects or homework.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If sabbath is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week. Plan a 24-hour sabbath. Consider the things that would nourish you and plan them spaciously into the day. Begin your sabbath gently the evening before. Light a candle. Invite the presence of Christ to guide you through your sabbath. Eat with family or friends. Go to bed early, praying for Christ to give you deep, refreshing sleep. Awake gently to your sabbath day. If possible, don’t set an alarm. Get up slowly and attend to your desire to encounter God today.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current sabbath rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm?

2

Creating a rhythm of sabbath is about celebrating who God is, how He has made you and growing in intimacy with Him. Consider this rhythm as a weekly holiday - it will take planning and creativity but can become highly anticipatory. What types of activities bring your soul rest and rejuvenation?

3

What would you need to do to create a rhythm of sabbath in your week?

4

What is your plan for practicing sabbath this week? Be as specific as possible.

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would sabbath be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

God works and rests. What are the implications of that for people made in His image?

Read Exodus 20:8-10. What's the difference between a day off and a sabbath? How can you make the distinction in your own practice?

Does the idea of practicing sabbath come with preconceived ideas? What are they? Where did those come from?

What makes a sabbath day nourishing and enjoyable to you?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

CONFESSION

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. — 1 John 1:9

*A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

SYNOPSIS:

The rhythm of confession incorporates a right view of God, a right view of self, and a desire for transformation. Learning to trust God is who He says He is and truly believing He holds you safe in a divine embrace can offer freedom for self-examination. From this reflective space, we can offer our brokenness as an invitation. We invite God to make us new and reveal more. Confession as a rhythm includes observation of self, revelation of wrong, invitation for healing, and requisition for more. This pattern is met with open arms from God and a life of transformation.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When confession becomes a regular rhythm, some of the God-given fruit includes: Transformation into Christlikeness and awareness of your blind spots. Your eyes begin opening toward your temptations and God's work in your life. You will savor the gift of salvation and see yourself as God's loved and forgiven child no matter what you have done.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythm of confession, consider incorporating some of the following options. Choose someone you trust and ask them to begin an intentional relationship in which you tell the truth about who you are, and they pray for your transformation. Ask your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Take notice of your strong emotions this week - identify what triggers them, name the behaviors that occur as a result of them, and confess any sin related to them.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If confession is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest the following practice this week: End each day with the following prayer. Talk with Him about what comes up and confess your sins to Him.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

God, I pray these words of the psalmist with great hesitation.

They are devastatingly honest. They lay things so bare. They allow no room for negotiation or compromise. I fear the scrutiny. I dread the probe. I resist the intrusion. I know that you are all love and so I am entering nothing more than your scrutiny of love. And yet...

No! I refuse to allow my fears to keep me from your love.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current confession rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm?

2

Creating a rhythm of confession will open a door to honest, authentic living with God and one another. What is your initial hesitation in being fully known by God or others?

3

What would you need to do to create a rhythm of confession in your week?

4

What is your plan for practicing confession this week? Be as specific as possible

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would confession be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What are some ways you avoid admitting your failings? Are there ways that - after you admit your faults - you can relax and let them go? What steps can you take to keep from reliving over and over the wrongs you have done?

Discuss the differences between a general confession like "Father, forgive me for all of my sins" and a specific naming of sin one by one. Which do you tend to do more?

What has your experience with confession been like in the past?

How could our group form an environment that is more conducive for people to confess sin?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

SIMPLICITY

"The Christian discipline of simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle."

— Richard J. Foster

"If buying stuff hasn't made you happy, maybe getting rid of it will."

— Joshua Becker

"The central point for the discipline of simplicity is to seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness of His kingdom first, and then everything necessary will come in its proper order."

— Richard J. Foster

SYNOPSIS:

The practice of simplicity starts from within and produces an outward response. The addition of this rhythm to our daily lives helps us place our possessions and wealth inside a proper perspective. It reminds us that the hunger for status, glamour, and luxury doesn't satisfy. It also frees us to genuinely enjoy our possessions without our possessions destroying us.

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

When simplicity becomes a regular rhythm, some of the God-given fruit includes being set free from the love of 'stuff' and experiencing joy, balance, and freedom. Simplicity allows your identity to be rooted in God's love, not your accumulation of possessions. This rhythm also reorients our view of everything we possess and allows us to trust God in new and different ways.

EXAMPLES:

As you expand your rhythm of simplicity, consider buying items for their usefulness rather than for status. Find something you own and don't need this week and give it to someone who does. Evaluate your daily habits to see if any of them are enslaving you. Engage in a practice this week that is fulfilling without accumulating.

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

If simplicity is not a regular rhythm for you, we suggest trying the following practice for this week: Take some time to pray over your time commitments. Simplicity is more than removing physical belongings. It also promotes participating in the things you value most. Decide what is most valuable and remove the things that distract you from that.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

1

What is your current simplicity rhythm? What would you like to add or take away to enhance this rhythm?

2

Creating a rhythm of simplicity provides an opportunity to evaluate the state of your heart. As you have considered this rhythm, what has God revealed to you about your heart?

3

What would you need to do to create a rhythm of simplicity in your week?

4

What is your plan for practicing simplicity this week? Be as specific as possible.

Downstream

A practice that comes easily or naturally to you.

Upstream

Practices that don't come easily; a practice that seems difficult or unnatural to you.

Would simplicity be beneficial for you to pursue? Why or why not?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How has the "more is better" mentality shaped you?

Do you envy those who have more things or more opportunities than you? Explain.

How much of your identity is wrapped up in what you own and where you go? Who are you without all these acquisitions and opportunities?

What is it like for you to give away things you still want and like?

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

RESOURCES

ALL RHYTHMS:

Celebration Of Discipline by Richard J Foster

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adee Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit Of The Disciplines by Dallas Willard

Practicingtheway.org

MEDITATION:

New Seeds Of Contemplation by Thomas Merton

Here And Now: Living In The Spirit by Henri Nouwen

Devotional Classics by Richard Foster

PRAYER:

Open Mind, Open Heart by Thomas Keating

Contemplativeoutreach.org

Daily Prayer (app)

With Christ in the School of Prayer by Andrew Murray

Prayer by Timothy Keller

Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster

31 Days of Prayer from Bridgetown Church
bridgetown.church/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PrayerCard.pdf

SILENCE & SOLITUDE RHYTHM:

Invitation to Solitude and Silence by Ruth Haley Barton

Bridgetown Church on Silence and Solitude
<https://bridgetown.church/series/silence-solitude/>

FASTING

Fasting: The Ancient Practices by Scot McKnight

God's Chosen Fast by Arthur Wallis

SABBATH

Sabbath Summit Bridgetown Audio Podcast
nbc.church/BridgetownPodcast

24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life by Matthew Sleeth MD

Sabbath as Resistance by Walter Brueggemann

CONFESSION

The Confessions of St. Augustine, translated by William C. Creasy. pp 354-430

The Healing Light by Agnes Sanford. pp. 111-117

"The Prayer of Confession" from The Book of Common Prayer, p. 360

SIMPLICITY

The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own by Joshua Becker

Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World by Richard J. Foster

The Way of Simplicity: the Cistercian Tradition by Esther de Waal