



Week 1 - Practice

1. Silence and Solitude/Prayer

How do we escape the chaos of life?

In the chaos of the urban, digital age, it's easier than ever before to "gain the whole world, and yet lose your soul." How do we stay emotionally alive and spiritually awake? Among the ancient practices of the way, "Silence & Solitude" is the number one practice for apprenticeship to Jesus. Simply put, it's a moment of intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God. In the modern era, this just might be the first step to a life well lived.

Begin with silence and prayer (5 minutes)

Gather together as a Community in a comfortable setting (around a table, on the couch, the floor of a living room, etc.). Say a quick prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your time together. Then spend a few minutes in silence. Why silence, even while together? Because we live in a busy, noisy world, under a non-stop assault of distraction. In the midst of all the chaos, it's hard at times to hear the voice of God, and that of our brothers and sisters. As we gather together as a family, we want to hear what the Father is saying to and *through* each of us, and respond in turn. A great way to do that is to begin each time with silence and prayer.

Talk about the coming week's practice as a Community (10-30 minutes)

Here's the practice for the coming week: First...

1. Identify a time/place that works well for you

- **Time:** For most people, first thing in the morning works best. You're rested, fresh, and the day is young. For others, a more optimal time slot is when kids are napping in the late morning, or on a lunch break, after work, or before you go to bed. Feel free to experiment until you find the right fit.
- **Place:** Find a place that is quiet and as distraction free as possible. A comfortable chair with a blanket and candle nearby works well for a lot of people. Weather permitting, a park or nature reserve are also a good bet.

2. Set a modest goal

- **Beginners:** It's better to start small and work your way up. We recommend you start with ten minutes, 3-5 days a week.
- **Intermediate:** If you already practice silence and solitude a few times a week, consider upping it to every day.
- **Advanced:** If you already practice silence and solitude daily, consider upping your time (to, say, an hour), or just giving your time a high level of focus.

Then, for the practice...

1. Put away your phone or any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable

- For most people, sitting with your back straight, shoulders relaxed, legs on the floor is a good start. Others do better lying on their back in a relaxed position.
- Some of you may prefer to do this exercise while walking or doing something simple with your hands, like laundry or drawing.

2. Begin with a breathing prayer

- Close your eyes.

- Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just “watch” your breath go in and out.
- Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
- Your mind *will* seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do’s, and distractions. That’s okay. Don’t judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, “Father...” and come back to your breathing.
- In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run.

3. Spend a few minutes “abiding in the vine”

- Transition from your breathing prayer to “the practice of the presence of God.”
- Notice God’s presence all around you, *in* you. For some people it’s helpful to imagine the Father is sitting in the chair across from you or on a throne.
- Welcome his love, joy, and peace from the Holy Spirit.
- If you want, open your mind and imagination to listen for God’s voice, or get something off your chest in prayer.
- But the main goal here is simply to “be with Jesus.” Don’t feel like you have to “do” anything. Just relax and enjoy his presence.

4. Close in a prayer of gratitude and commit the rest of your day to the Father

A few things to note:

1. You can’t “succeed” or “fail” at this practice. All you can do is show up. *Be patient*. This takes some people years to master. Resist the urge to say, “I’m bad at this” or “This isn’t for me.” Don’t judge yourself, especially if you’re an overachiever type.
2. If you’re more of an “S” on the Meyer’s Briggs, and sitting still is just death, you might want to try this while doing a stretching exercise or going on a walk somewhere quiet and distraction free (like a park or short hike). Apply the same idea to a walking prayer, and just focus on your walking instead of your breathing.

2. Bible Reading

Visit the thebibleproject.com to join us at Neighborhood as we read through the entire Bible. Reading plans, videos, and other helpful resources and podcasts are all available at The Bible Project.

3. Sabbath

Here's the practice for the coming week:

- Mark out a 24 hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship
- Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your sabbath.
- Ideas to begin:
 - Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands to “remember” and “observe” the sabbath.
 - Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids, or the straight edge)
 - Read a Psalm or say a liturgy
 - Pray: ask the Holy Spirit bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours
 - Share a meal with your family or friends
 - Go around the table and do “highlight of the week”
- Ideas to end:
 - Take a prayer walk
 - Read a Psalm
 - Thank God for the last 24 hours
 - Extinguish the candles of sabbath
 - Share a meal

Spend an entire day in rest and worship: fill your day with activities that are life-giving - eating, drinking, reading the Bible or a good book, making love to your spouse, playing games with your kids, time with family and friends, a walk to the park, napping, prayer, singing, etc.