

THE HABITS  
OF FAITH

*daily prayer, weekly worship,  
monthly service and yearly giving*

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## How to use this book

This book is designed as a workbook for a four-week series of classes that encourages participants to adopt four spiritual habits: daily prayer, weekly worship, monthly service, yearly giving. Daily prayer is made a priority; so the participant is asked to accept a thirty day challenge to pray ten minutes each day. Thus, in the first class (and in the introduction of this book and the first chapter), the participant learns about habits and four significant ways of praying. For each of the thirty days following the class, the book provides encouragement and a place to keep track of progress. Additionally, online audio guides are provided to help the participant navigate the new types of prayer they are learning about. You can find those online meditations at [www.waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://www.waynepres.org/dailymeditation).

If you are using this text as part of a class, read the second, third and fourth chapters before their corresponding classes. If you are using this as a self-study workbook, you might wish to read the chapters together and then use the daily encouragements over the following thirty days.

This book will serve you best if you try to practice the habits described herein. You might benefit simply from the content, but the habits, once established, are far more critical than what you might be able to glean from simple reading.



# INTRODUCTION

*“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.” — Phil. 4:8*

IN *LETTERS TO A YOUNG DOUBTER*, WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN writes, “...let me say that religious faith often goes through three stages: conscious, self-conscious, and finally unconscious. That takes time. Only when you’ve reached the third stage are you free, and free perhaps to be really happy.”

Virtue ethics is a concept which arose independently of Christianity but can be discovered within it as well and speaks to Coffin’s unconscious stage.

Virtue ethics in brief: it's the people we belong with who shape us—our families, our friends, our churches. If you grew up in a family that prioritized saving over spending, you'll probably have the same virtue (and you may not even understand why you get antsy if your spouse doesn't). If your mom made lists of pros and cons, you'll probably take a similar approach to thinking through a decision. If your friends listened to alternative rock, you probably know a great deal about it. If you saw your grandfather at the table each morning with a bible, you'll have a greater respect for that book than you might otherwise. If you grew up going to church every week, your children are more likely to grow up going to church every week. If the church of your childhood focused on feeding the hungry, it's likely you'll consider that a virtue of a good church when you grow up.

The power of these communities to shape us toward certain virtues is so pervasive and subtle that we may not even recognize their influence--their ethic is simply embedded in us. Let me offer an overly simplistic example: some people throw a paper bag out the car window without a second thought, while for others, the thought would never enter their heads--and if they witnessed someone else do it, they'd feel a little scandalized. It's unlikely either person--either the one who litters or the one who doesn't--has given extensive thought to the practice. One grew up with a parent who did it on long road trips, and one grew up with a parent that gave them the universal face of disapproval whenever they threw a napkin at the trash and missed. That is to say, they inherited this virtue.

We inherit not only a whole host of our virtues—but just as many of our behaviors.

All of this means we have some habits (just like we have some virtues) we never consciously chose--they were chosen for us. Did any of us really choose to start brushing our teeth? Or make our beds? I didn't. They were holdovers from my childhood. If I were to consider them now, I suspect I would agree they are good practices and continue them. Such a

continuation would be easy. After all, after nearly forty years, brushing my teeth has become habitual.

But this also means we inherit some conferred behaviors we'd probably rather not. For instance, my family celebrates with food. When something good happens, I instinctively reach for the nearest snack. It's a habit that I have reconsidered because too many cookies isn't good for my health, but it's one that is hard to overcome since I have to be extremely conscious just to notice it.

Habits are powerful that way.

Now, some people think that a commitment to forming faith habits is a bad idea. They don't want you "going through the motions" with something so critical. They would prefer you to be mindful each time you make a decision about faith, each time you choose to go to worship, each time you give to someone in need, each time you pray. There is much to commend this line of thinking. Mindfulness, while usually attributed to Eastern religions, has a robust history with Christianity as well. Mindfulness deepens our everyday experience. Mindfulness renders greater meaning in our life. In short, mindfulness is great.

It's also exhausting.

It's so exhausting that teachers of mindfulness are always trying to develop small, automatic behaviors in their students that will extend their practice of mindfulness beyond their initial excitement—things like stating your intention for the day before you get out of bed or naming things for which you are grateful when you get back in bed. In short, habits.

Habits help us through the day. They can help us in faith too. In fact, they can help us tremendously. Just like they do when we develop exercise habits, and we're out the door for a run before we can consciously choose whether we really want to do that today or not. Just like they do when we unconsciously pass up the cookie for the apple because that's the snack "we always had growing up."

The challenge, of course, is establishing the right habits. To do that, it's important to understand how habits work.

### How Habits Work

In *The Power of Habits* Charles Duhigg describes the habit loop. The loop outlines a cycle of behavior that starts with a *cue*, followed by a short *routine*, and ends with a *reward*. Cue. Routine. Reward. We'll be using those words often together. Consider your own habits. It's time to go to bed (cue), so you brush your teeth (routine), and they feel clean and fresh (reward). Or mine from earlier. Something good happens (cue), so I grab a cookie (routine), and my taste buds join in the celebration, and I get a little kick of sugar (reward).

Here's another: It's Sunday morning (cue), I go to church (routine), and I feel more grounded (reward). Now, every theological fiber in my body wants to shout out that I go to church on Sundays to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever" as the old creed says, but if I reflect on missing a Sunday, the first thing I notice is that I don't feel grounded. It's one of the rewards of weekly worship.

The more we engage in a habit, says Duhigg, the more the loop becomes part of our life. Or, to use a word to describe a word, habitual. Also, the more we engage in that habit, the more we begin to enjoy the prospect of the reward. Our little surge of happiness, or excitement, or grounding starts to happen closer to the cue for our habit—even before the routine begins. Which is why it is so hard to stop reaching for the cookie—our physical selves have already started enjoying it before we even take a bite!

If any part of this loop isn't present, it's much harder to establish the habit. For instance, tooth brushing didn't become habitual in this country until Pepsodent added a small irritant to their formula, which created the tingling sensation that nearly all of us associate with a clean mouth. That irritant does nothing to

clean our mouths; it just functions as a reward. That reward is a means to a greater end—greater dental health.

As such, we'll identify in this program some of the rewards associated with faith habits—even though we don't worship for our own sake, and we don't pray so our blood pressure drops, and we don't serve so we can learn something, and we don't give because it lowers our taxes. We do these things because we're disciples, because they are the right things to do, because it is in the character of Christians to do them, but it is also fortunate that the God we follow has built in some rewards to make our habits easier to establish, that they might lead us to greater ends as well.

### Creating New Habits

We create new habits all the time. Sometimes they come easily. Sometimes they are a struggle. Okay, mostly they are a struggle.

Following Duhigg's research, if you want to develop a new habit, you would do two primary things:

1. Choose a specific cue.
2. Choose a specific reward.

For instance, if I want to make a habit of saving money, when receiving a paycheck (cue), I would immediately write a check for my savings account for 10% of it (routine), and then I would (fill-in-the-blank reward).

Cravings drive the development of habits. Cravings often exist to offset emotions we usually consider to be negative. We check Facebook when we feel lonely or disconnected. We shop when we feel small or inferior. We crack open a beer when we feel frustrated. Now, checking Facebook or shopping or drinking a beer are not destructive habits, but when we compulsively or habitually do them to offset emotions rather than deal with them in a more constructive way, those habits can become destructive.

For instance, instead of withdrawing to Facebook every time we feel lonely, we could meet a friend for coffee, or join a book club, or go to worship.

Instead of shopping every time we feel small, we could use our considerable gifts to help out someone else.

Instead of cracking open a beer every time we feel frustrated, we could go for a run or pray.

We satisfy our craving to feel better by substituting healthy habits for bad ones. In doing so, it also helps us break some of those bad habits. (A caveat: clearly, bad habits—especially addictions—don’t just disappear; they have a tendency to stick. We can improve our chances of breaking them, however, if we identify our cues and cravings and look toward healthier rewards.)

Cravings don’t just offset negative emotions. Sometimes they exist because we love the positive ones. When I exercise, I feel great. After I’ve done that for a while, I begin to crave that good feeling. When I spend time with my wife, I’m happier. I crave that feeling. The driving claim behind *The 4 Habits* is that prayer, worship, service and generosity create such positive experiences that they’re easy to turn into positive habits, thereby helping us live more meaningful lives through the power of habit.

As we learn these healthy habits, we’re not going to start by pitting them against the unhealthy ones. That’ll just make things harder. Instead, we’ll learn them in isolation, noting their positive benefits. Then once we’ve established a fairly strong habit, we’ll see if it makes sense to replace some unhealthy ones. Actually, your brain will start that process before we even get to it. To understand why, let’s do some rudimentary (and I do mean rudimentary) brain science.

#### A little bit of brain science

I’m not a scientist. I’m a pastor. Given the uneasy and contentious relationship those two professions have forged over the last hundred years, I wouldn’t bat an eye if you chose to skip

this section entirely. I have no training in neuroscience, but I'm providing a brief and simplified version of the neuroscience I have learned in researching the question of how the brain works in the development of habits.

We'll start with a classic definition: a habit is any automatic response to our environment (as little of our daily behavior is conscious—most of what we do is actually habit). A habit can be a behavior, a thought, an emotion or a physiological response.

Habits are learned and maintained by the reinforcement circuits of our brains. You can think of reinforcement as any time we notice our lives just got a little better. Reinforcement can be either positive—we call that a reward—or negative—we call that relief, i.e. anytime we go from bad to not so bad. For instance, you have a queasy stomach and a shot milk of magnesia makes you feel better. There is nothing pleasurable about milk of magnesia but it provides relief. Therefore, next time you have a queasy stomach, you'll turn to it again.

Habits arise from the brain's desire to make our lives better. When it comes to making your life better, your brain takes the short view, focusing on the next ten minutes. It's a different part of your brain (the prefrontal cortex) that takes the long view. Sadly, the prefrontal cortex works in the conscious mind, and the short view circuits work in the subconscious mind. Which means, of course, that the ten-minute window of reward or relief is the one that predominates in your decision making.

So, your brain, specifically the VTA, is on the constant look out for how to make your life better in the next ten minutes. (A note: it's always someway to make your immediate life better. Bad habits arise from short term rewards that come with long-term negative consequences. Cake, for instance).

What's the VTA? The Venetian Teachers Association. Not really. I wanted to see if you had zoned out yet. Stay with me a little further.

The VTA is the Ventral Tegmental Area of the brain. It's located in a charming area of the brain, just north of the amygdala (everyone's favorite landmark!). The VTA is like a con man, always looking for opportunities to make life better, always weighing the options, never concerned with the long term effects. For instance, you walk into the snack room at work and two plates of food sit on the counter--freshly baked chocolate chip cookies on one platter and raw carrots on the other. It's the VTA that starts to weigh the various rewards of the cookie vs. the carrot. Let's see, the cookie has a nice jolt of sugar which will elevate my mood and provide additional energy to get me through the work day. And it smells like it did when I walked into my house after elementary school and mom had been baking—and that's a nice memory that makes me feel warm and safe. And the carrot (remember, the unconscious part of this decision making process is based only on the next ten minutes) is crunchy.

No wonder we pick up the cookie.

The VTA only evaluates the possibilities. It doesn't actually make the decision. It sends out a dopamine signal to the two areas of the brain that do make the decision that an opportunity for a better life is on the table: the nucleus accumbens (which makes subconscious decisions) and the Prefrontal cortex (which makes the conscious ones). The prefrontal cortex can weigh in on the side of the carrot, "It's got vitamins! It's got minerals! You don't want diabetes! Crunchy is good! You like crunchy!" but if you're not paying attention, not actively making the decision, you're nucleus accumbens is going to second the motion of your VTA and is going to pick up that cookie. The other hurdle your prefrontal cortex has to overcome is that the nucleus accumbens doesn't deliberate. It acts. And it's a whole lot faster than your conscious mind. If you've ever been on a diet and didn't realize the cookie was in your mouth until it you could taste the chocolate, you know how quick the nucleus accumbens is.

One final destination, the basal ganglia, is where that entire routine is stored for future use. It's permanent memory, as well. Which is why when you're trying to break a bad habit, you're

sure to relapse—because the bad habit is stored there forever. It’s why alcoholics talk about being in recovery forever. Picking up that drink is hardwired into the basal ganglia. Given the right triggers and a distracted or worn down prefrontal cortex, the old routine is called up. It’s also why relapse to old habits while developing new habits is the norm.

If you’re working on developing a new habit, the old routine that used to satisfy a certain craving is still hanging around and will always be hanging around, and you will relapse at some point to your old way of doing business. The way you respond to your relapse is the key to whether or not the new way of doing business, your new habit, will succeed. Eventually, the new habit will take up residence in the basal ganglia—and the mindless part of your brain will choose it as the best routine to deploy, but it takes time. So, don’t sweat the relapse. Acknowledge it and move on.

If your habit is one that provides relief—say self-medicating when you feel bad—and you relapse, the guilt from the relapse makes you feel even worse, and of course, you’re already employing a behavior to relieve your pain, so you self-medicate a bit more, which after a short time makes you feel worse, and on and on and on.

Let’s just agree to acknowledge the relapse and move on.

### A note on the habits I have chosen

I’ve chosen four habits instead of six or eight or ten so they might feel more manageable. Clearly, daily scripture reading could enrich any Christian. As you will see in the forthcoming chapters, both daily prayer and weekly worship are grounded in scripture. Hospitality, as a foundational aspect of Christianity, could have also made the list. Additionally, you could develop habits of theological study, singing, fasting, fellowship, sharing of the Christian story, and others.

I've chosen these four because, for me, they strike at the heart of the matter. Also, because I could engineer them on daily, weekly, monthly and yearly cycles—thereby tapping into different temporal cues so it feels like your endeavoring to take up one new habit at a time.

When daily prayer, weekly worship, monthly service and yearly giving become habitual, we can turn our attention to some of those other enriching behaviors.

# CHAPTER ONE

## *prayer*

*“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”--Martin Luther King, Jr.*

PRAYER IS A FUNNY THING FOR CHRISTIANS. IT'S SOMETHING we're encouraged to do, but it's something we're rarely taught how to do. You are a rare person if, after the age of 18, someone sat down with you and taught you how to pray. (You're semi-rare if it happened past the age of twelve.)

Luckily, I was one of those exceptions. When I was a young adult, I was taught the art of contemplative prayer by a daily practitioner of it. In a couple thousand words, you'll be an exception too.

But let's start at the beginning. What are your earliest memories of prayer? Did you pray around the table with your parents? Did you pray at night before bedtime? Did someone teach you the ACTS prayer (adoration, confession, thanksgiving

and supplication)? Did you learn the Lord's prayer ("Our Father, who art in heaven..."—or as my youngest used to say, "Our Father, who aren't in heaven...")?

I suspect your first memories of prayer will, more or less, reflect your current attitudes toward prayer. This is part of our problem. Let me be clear: the prayers of children are often the most honest and heartfelt prayers you will ever hear. Just as the clothing you see on children is some of the cutest clothing you will ever see. But you don't wear a smocked jumper as an adult. You don't brush your teeth with bubble gum flavored toothpaste. You don't sleep with a mountain of stuffed animals. At some point, you recognize that the things that carried weight for us as children don't always work as adults. When we were five, a teddy bear may have been enough to calm our fears at night. Our fears need something of more substance now. Just as when we were five, Noah's ark was a cute story about how God saved the world. When we're forty five, Noah's ark is a dark story about how God punished the world. What changed? Life. The answers that worked when we were five aren't enough for us now. The prayers we said when we were five aren't enough for us now. "Now I lay me down to sleep..." doesn't cover the range of adult concerns we carry around.

Consider: when we were five no one taught us to *listen* in our prayers. Prayer is a conversation with God, though. The concept of conversation wouldn't be lost on a five year old, but she would—because she is a concrete thinker—listen for an actual voice. The abstract thinking required to understand how God speaks to us in prayer would be lost on a five year old. So we don't teach them that part.

It's a shame that by the time we are capable of conceiving of prayer in a more mature manner, we've more or less stopped the teaching of prayer. So, prepare to be an exception.

Before we do that, let's remember something we learned about the brain in the previous chapter. Habits usually spring from a desire for the brain to make life better.

I'm going to quote from a story run by the AP a few years ago about how prayer makes life better:

It turns out peaceful thoughts really can influence our bodies, right down to the instructions we receive from our DNA, according to a new study.

Researchers for the study, published in the Public Library of Science, took blood samples from a group of 19 people who *habitually meditated or prayed* (emphasis added) for years, and 19 others who never meditated.

The researchers ran genomic analyses of the blood and found that the meditating group suppressed more than twice the number of stress-related genes -- about 1,000 of them -- than the nonmeditating group.

The more these stress-related genes are expressed, the more the body will have a stress response like high blood pressure or inflammation. Over long periods of time, these stress responses can worsen high blood pressure, pain syndromes and other conditions.

The nonmeditating group then spent 10 minutes a day for eight weeks training in relaxation techniques that involved repeating a prayer, thought, sound, phrase or movement.

"What this does is to break the train of everyday thought -- you no longer have stressful thoughts and because of that the body is able to return to a healthy state," said Dr. Herbert Benson, director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute Mind/Body Medicine and an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.

By the end of the training, the novice meditating group was also suppressing stress-related genes, although at lower levels than those of the long-term meditating people.

After ten minutes a day for eight weeks, the first time pray-ers were already suppressing stress-related genes. No wonder prayer

(or meditation—they are not only similar but meditation also has a significant history within Christianity) has been cited as lowering blood pressure and improving your heart rate, breathing and immune system. Additionally, studies have shown increased ability to pay attention and learn, improved memory, and heightened perception. Let's move from science to art. Artists claim that the frame of mind that results from prayer or meditation makes them more creative and better producers of work. In short, if prayer were a pill, it would be hailed as a miracle drug—with not a single negative side effect. Not too shabby. No wonder Paul tells us to pray without ceasing.

But let's not forget our simple brain lesson from the previous chapter: the VTA, the part of our brain that wants to make our life better, wants to do so *in the next ten minutes*. Most of what I just listed are long-term effects of prayer.

But what benefit can prayer offer in the next ten minutes that will help us make this process an automatic one, rather than one that always has to be consciously chosen?

Let's do an exercise: write down everything flitting through your mind right now. I know you're reading this book, but you're also wondering what to cook for dinner, trying to figure out if you have time for a walk, thinking about the report your boss asked you for, listening for the buzzer on the laundry. Write down the extraneous thoughts that have been buzzing through the last few minutes here. (Note: this is a workbook. It's okay. You can write in it.):

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Now notice your body. Are you taking shallow breaths or deep ones? Do your shoulders feel tight? Take your pulse and

note the number. How do you feel? Take time to write these observations as well:

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I'll do the exercise with you: Moments before starting the exercise, my brain had flitted through retirement planning, a pastoral visit I had just made, the process of writing, and my daughter's Tae Kwon Do class. Physically, my breath was shallow, I felt some tightness in my neck, my body was off-center and I could feel the anxiety in my arms. For some reason, my heart rate was about twenty beats a minute higher than my normal range. Perhaps it was my poor night of sleep last night.

Now, spend two minutes in absolute silence. It's important that you actually do this. Find or make a quiet space. Once there, find a comfortable way to sit. Instead of placing your hands in your lap or clutching your knees, turn your palms up and open your hands like you're gently holding something large in your lap. Breathe slowly in, then breath slowly out. Repeat the deep breaths. Remain silent for two minutes (don't worry about the exact time—just be silent for what you think might be two minutes). Thoughts will continue flitting through your mind, but when they do, just note them and let them go. Focus on your breathing.

Go ahead and start. I'll be waiting here for you to return.

Now notice your body once again. How do you feel now? Write down in a few words any changes you notice:

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My results: my body feels lighter, my breaths are fuller, the tightness in my neck is gone and my pulse dropped 22 beats per minute! Is that even possible?

Most people I do this short exercise with have one of two typical reactions. The first: they were unable to relax at all during that two minutes. During the first moment of silence, their brain kicks in and says, “Finally, an opportunity to think about what I need to get done.” And so, they think about the bills, and the crack in the ceiling of the bedroom, and how they still haven’t cleaned out the garage, and what they’re going to get mom for Christmas. If this was your reaction, I’d like to gently suggest, you’re in deep need of more silence in your life. (What does silence have to do with prayer? We’ll get there.)

The second reaction to this short moment of silence is that they feel measurably better (or a variant—“it wasn’t quite long enough”—which is their body informing them that they were on the way to feeling measurably better). If this is true for you, let me gently suggest you’re in deep need of more silence in your life.

Let’s assume you had the second response (most who have the first response end up having the second response after they practice a little). If two minutes of silence can make you feel that much better immediately, imagine what ten minutes can do. Imagine if that ten minutes was spent connecting to God. This is what rudimentary contemplative prayer is all about. We spend time in God’s presence, practicing silence, so that we might hear God speak to us.

You’ve already heard about the long-term effects of prayer. And you just experienced the short-term effects of silence. Can we make that something your VTA might recommend to your nucleus accumbens more often? I think so. Here’s how:

### The Cue

I suspect if you already have some habit of prayer, it’s tied to a specific time cue. For instance, many people pray before a

meal. It's routine. Or, if your parents taught you to pray, you might have a hold-over of saying prayers at bedtime. I know some people who wake up early to say prayers. The alarm clock is their cue.

When I consider my prayers, it's also clear to me I've developed some random cues for certain types of prayers. For instance, every time I hear a siren, I make a prayer of intervention. That's something my youth pastor used to do that I picked up. When I see a digital clock at 1:11 or 2:22 or something similar, I say a prayer of gratitude for something in my life. I'm not sure why, but it stuck. When I pass over train tracks, I say a specific prayer of gratitude for my wife. Why? I have no idea. I do know, however, that whatever cue we choose can be a powerful trigger for certain behaviors. I've been doing these things for years.

It seems if we're interested in making prayer a daily habit, we should pick a daily cue—not an irregular one. Take a moment and consider what you do every day. For me, the list is pretty short: wake up, shower, brush teeth, eat, and go to bed. Those are probably the only things I do *every* day. Would it be possible for me to build a cue from one of these things?

Since the short term reward will work in my favor in establishing this routine, and since the short term prayer reward most prominent for me is relaxation, I might pick a cue during a time I need to relax. For instance, after dinner. Of course, after dinner, I already have a habit that helps me relax. My family and I go for a walk. Perhaps just before bedtime then. Brushing my teeth could be my cue.

How about you? Do you have a cup of coffee every morning? Or brew a pot? If so, you could start a pot and then sit down and spend time in prayer, enjoying a cup of coffee when you're done (you might even buy the really good stuff while you're developing your new habit). Or are you most stressed at work? If so, you could set aside ten minutes at the end of your lunch time. Are you a stay-at-home parent with kids in school? Your cue to

pick up your kids every day could be moved ahead ten minutes so you'll be in a more relaxed state when you see them.

Of course, it would be best to pick a cue that would work every day, but don't make this into a burden (after all, Jesus said his burden was light). If everyday prayer for you actually means prayer five days a week, that's a wonderful thing too.

### The Routine

Your routine is the prayer itself. In the next section, we'll cover several types of prayer for you to explore. Then in your first four weeks, I'll actually guide you through them.

### The Reward

Do you ever make to-do lists? My wife tells me one of her favorite things to do is to check things off a to-do list. It gives her a sense of satisfaction. Once she told me that, I noticed that I enjoy it too. Occasionally, I'll even put something on the list that I have already done just to mark it out. It feels good.

That's an example of a small reward. It's an example of the closure of a routine that needed to be done. Charles Duhigg tells the story of Febreze and the massive take-off in sales after their advertisements started showing a woman cleaning her house and then spraying a little Febreze into the air so she could enjoy the clean smell. The irony is that Febreze was developed to remove all odors from an area--not mask them. But that clean scent they started adding to their product served as the reward at the end of a routine--cleaning the house--that helped solidify the habit (and in the process created a craving for a product no one knew about). Since prayer is something we'd like to establish as an everyday habit, our reward can't be too large.

Now, the experience of peace, relaxation, lower stress, intimacy with God might be strong enough with you as you begin that you don't need another reward. But since the real wonders of prayer are cumulative, some of us will need the satisfaction of crossing it off our to-do list, or the easiness by which it allows us

to fall asleep, or the first cup of coffee we treat ourselves to when we're done to help us out in the beginning.

For that reason, I've included a checkbox at the end of each day's entry starting on page 28 (and one for a spouse or partner as well). Thirty days. Check it off every day.

Now, something else might work better for you. But don't start the process until you've picked something. You can jot down some ideas here:

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### How to pray as an adult

You're almost ready to become an exception. But first I want to encourage you to state your intention to do this. Go ahead and say it out loud. Yes, you'll feel silly. If someone is in the room with you, just tell them that for the next thirty days, you'll be praying ten minutes each day. Why ten minutes? I know from personal experience that thirty minutes is just too daunting to fit into a busy life. It's worth it, but the hurdle is just too high for most folks. Ten minutes is sufficient. In fact, you've already seen one report that ten minutes works to suppress stress hormones. Your VTA likes to think in ten minute increments. Ten minutes is sufficient.

If you're wondering if you can fit ten minutes into your schedule, let me once again suggest you're in desperate need of slowing down a little, in desperate need of what prayer can offer. Ten minutes represents slightly under 1% of the average time we are awake each day. Surely we can render 1% of our waking hours to being present to God. (Note: the Christian story is not about guilt. In fact, it's a story about rescue from guilt. Sometimes while we talk about Christian habits, it awakens a

guilt within us. Let's do our best to set that aside a bit and focus on the improvements we're trying to make—and not on what we haven't done before.) Psychologists call what we just did reframing--moving from "How am I going to find another ten minutes in the day?" to "Of course I can spend 1% of my waking hours in conversation with God! Is that all?"

Finally, a short course on types of prayer.

**Thought observance.** Not technically a prayer, but a skill that will help you in contemplative prayer. Let's try a one minute exercise. For one minute, try to maintain silence in your mind. Naturally, as you try this, you will have thoughts. Instead of fighting them or welcoming them, we'll simply observe them and let them flutter away. Then return to a quiet mind. The first several times you do this, you'll have thought after thought. Observe and then return to silence. After a little bit of practice, you'll find fewer thoughts interrupting, and it will be easier to return to the silence. Once again, observe and return.

Practice now. It only takes a minute.

**Sacred Word or Phrase.** Rather than strict silence, most people find it easier to employ a phrase or piece of scripture that is repeated in the mind. For instance, when I use a phrase from scripture, it is often, "Jesus, remember me..." the first few words spoken by one of the thieves on the cross next to Jesus. I speak the word "Jesus"—internally, of course—as I inhale and "remember me" as I exhale. The benefit of a phrase is that you have a specific anchor to return to after you've observed an intruding thought. Additionally, that phrase tends to stay with you during the day, bubbling up at important moments. The phrase also acts as a spoken intention or entreaty to God. Other phrases from scripture that might be useful to you:

- The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. (Ps. 103:17)
- Jesus, have mercy on me. (Luke 17:13, adapted)
- Do not worry about the day. (Matt 6:34)

- I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:20)

- Those who wait on the Lord renew their strength. (Is 40:31)

- Not my will but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)

- Your kingdom come. (Luke 11:1)

- Seek and you shall find (Matt. 6:33, adapted)

- Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10)

Use one of these or another snippet of scripture that is meaningful for you that also works with your internal cadence and the rhythm of your breath. Use it as an anchor, gently returning to the repetition of the phrase after acknowledging the intrusion of other thoughts.

Some people use a singular word to the same effect: Love, Joy, Peace. You'll discover what works best for you as you practice.

Now, let's get to the four types of prayer we'll use over the next month.

**Centering Prayer.** Behind the practice of centering prayer is the disciple's intention to spend time in the presence of God. Centering prayer is less the conversation between two old married folks on the park bench and more the intimate silences that stretch between them.

As such, it is mostly about intention—and that makes it hard to do incorrectly. There are, however, ways to do it well. Thomas Keating, the monk who has done more than any other to introduce centering prayer to the American church, offers three simple guidelines.

1. Choose a sacred word [or phrase] to announce your intention to spend time with God.

2. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and after a small silence begin to offer that word.

3. When thoughts interrupt, Keating suggests taking “a friendly attitude toward the most dreadful thoughts,” knowing that our annoyance with those thoughts is often more intrusive than the thoughts themselves. Simply acknowledge the thoughts, then return to the sacred word or phrase and spend time in God’s presence.

To these guidelines, I add a simple one:

4. At the beginning of your prayer time, focus on the quality of your breathing before uttering your word or phrase.

Remember, the only way to do this prayer wrong is to choose not to do it. The purpose is to enter an intimate silence with God. God will be pleased by your intention, even if you get a little distracted.

The second week of the next four weeks will focus on centering prayer. The first three weeks will employ methods of silent prayer. We’ll return to discursive prayers later (prayers we internally vocalize our thoughts or petitions to God)—after we’ve learned to deepen our attention to God’s presence around us.

Why the second week and not the first? I’ve decided to make the first week a little easier on you through the use of guided prayer.

**Guided prayer.** During the first week, I’ll walk you through guided prayers. Join me at [waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://waynepres.org/dailymeditation) (or download the Wayne Presbyterian Church smartphone app for iPhone or Android), and I’ll walk you through a different prayer each day.

**Lectio Divina.** In this type of prayer, we read a short passage of scripture three times and follow each reading with silence. This is an ancient form of prayer that is typically practiced for longer stretches than the ten minutes we’ll be engaging in each

day. But we'll experience enough of its flavor to determine if it suits you well enough for further inquiry on your part.

During the first reading of the passage, we listen for a word or phrase that “pops” because a word or phrase that has the power to speak to our lives is likely to draw our attention when we need it. Lectio Divina is not a process of trying to figure out a singular, best meaning of a particular scripture. Rather, it is a process of listening to how God might speak to us in a scripture.

Sometimes Christians can grow frustrated with Lectio because they want to understand what the text means (i.e. the Prodigal son means that God loves us no matter what and will always greet us with open arms to us if we should return), but a practitioner of the prayer might focus on the phrase “but when he came to himself” and dwell on how God is bringing them into a fuller understanding of who they are.

Relax into the prayer, and trust that what you need will come to you. You are putting yourself into God's hands after all, your creator who knows you better than you know yourself and loves you deeply.

After listening for a word that pops, during the second reading of the text, we listen to the details of the text and choose a question we would like to ask. For instance, from the prodigal son, I want to ask, “If God is the father in this parable, how does it make God feel when I turn away?” Or “Why does the father interrupt the son's confessional?”

We are usually drawn to questions that parallel our own struggles or curiosity. By digging into them, we are addressing our own lives with the word of God. Ask the question, then wait in silence to see if any insights present themselves during your time of meditation. If an insight presents itself, feel free to actively engage it. Otherwise, wait.

During the last portion of Lectio Divina, we again sit in silence, as we did during centering prayer. Again, we are simply

acknowledging God's presence and our desire to be in it. We try to quiet our minds and simply be present. Often, however, the prior portions of the reading and prayer practice have created a fertile ground for thought. If you are excited by an insight, feel free to engage it rather than to simply quiet your mind. The engagement is very much part of the discursive or dialogical prayer that Christians engage in all the time.

During the third week of prayers, we'll practice *Lectio Divina*, and I'll repeat these instructions in the daily notes included later in the workbook.

**ACTS prayer.** ACTS stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. When you pray the ACTS prayer, you use the acronym as a way to remember the basic movements of this prayer.

*Adoration* is a feeling of profound love, respect, admiration. When we begin the ACTS prayer, we start with a statement of adoration. Essentially it is anything you might say to someone you deeply love about why you love them:

“Gracious God, you join me when I feel alone. You lift up those who feel low. You comfort those who are grieving. When I lost my job and didn't know what to do, you sent me people who could help me. You are, indeed, the best we could hope for...”

Or: “Gracious God, you are the one who made the heavens and the earth, the one who spins the planets and lights the suns on fire. You made the fine mechanics of a fly's wings as well as the grandeur of the great canyons...”

Adoration does not need to be poetic. It is just honest expression of something you love about God.

*Confession.* Why do we confess when we pray? Because we feel that we can not be honestly present to others when we are keeping secrets from them. Consider your own life; consider

some time you held a secret from a friend. Were you able to be with them comfortably without confessing it? Probably not.

That's one of the reasons we confess.

Another reason? God is the one who can create something whole out of something we might have broken. Is there someone better to tell? Not really.

Tell the truth in your prayer and have a little grace for yourself in the process. God knows the depth of the human heart and loves us just as we are.

*Thanksgiving* is probably the simplest of the four sections of the ACTS prayer for me. Thank you for my family. Thank you for my church. Thank you for meaningful work. Thank you for the people you have brought into my life who care for me. Thank you for scripture, which I love to play with. Thank you...

*Supplication* is an act of trusting that God is good all the time. We don't make supplications because we lack trust in God to care for us without a reminder, but because we wish to express to God our deep love for our family ("Please help mom through this cancer."), our friends ("Jane is struggling with work right now"), our community ("Lord, we're having a terrible time in the high school with drinking."), and our world ("I'm really concerned about the unrest in Egypt."). Supplication helps make our hearts supple.

When we do this type of discursive prayer during the fourth week, I'll repeat these instructions too.

Those are the four types of prayer I'm sharing with you. So, let's get to work. Today is your first day (or tomorrow if the time you wish to pray each day is earlier than this). Put your check mark on the daily encouragement on the next page. Also, visit [waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://waynepres.org/dailymeditation) for guided meditations that will

take you through the first week. And, remember, relapses are part of the process.

Take a moment to write down a daily cue:

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And a reward:

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If you forget a day, start again the next. If you forget two days, start again. If you forget three days, give up and eat a cookie to suppress your feelings of guilt—no! Just start again. You can do it.

### One Final Thing

A quick addendum to help with your cues: the authors of *Training your Brain to Adopt Healthful Habits* suggest eight different types of reminders (that can function as cues also) to help you adopt a new habit. A handful of them also work for adopting a practice of prayer.

1. Written cues: I'll help you with this one. If you're using this book as part of a class, you'll receive a daily email reminding you of your commitment that day. If not, put it on your calendar for each day.

2. Visual cues: If you were trying to lose weight, you might tape a picture of a healthier you to the cookie jar. If you're trying to adopt a daily practice of prayer, you might tape a picture of someone praying on your bathroom mirror where you do your bedtime routine. Or a small picture in front of the coffee pot.

3. Verbal cues: Ask someone to remind you of your daily goal. "Have you done your prayer yet?"

4. Social cues: Surround yourself with others who pray daily. Just being around them will help you participate more regularly.

5. Digital/scheduling cues: Do you keep your calendar on a phone? If so, schedule your routine and set an alarm for it. I went a step further and downloaded a habits app that allowed me to check off each day as I finished my prayer time.

# Day One

Today is the first day of a thirty day challenge to pray each day for ten minutes. Commit to it now! A number of studies have shown how much simply setting a goal and then signing your name to it can make a difference in follow through.

So, let me help you out.

Today, I commit to praying ten minutes each day for the next thirty days.

\_\_\_\_\_, *signature*

\_\_\_\_\_, *signature of a partner*  
(if you've invited someone to participate with you)

If you are joining us in class, then you've already done the first day of prayer. If you aren't part of a class, you can find the meditations at: [www.waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://www.waynepres.org/dailymeditation)

Part of training your brain to subconsciously consider prayer is to fully notice the short term effects it provides. Each day I ask you to jot down a few words to describe how you feel before prayer and how you feel after prayer. Make a habit of jotting down a few notes to help you fix the difference in how you feel in your mind.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day One complete   (second box for a spouse/partner)

## Day Two

Your decision to commit to a program of prayer over the next thirty days can improve your sense of God's involvement in your life. And it can have immediate effects for you now.

I hope you have chosen a specific time to pray today. If you've already missed it, fear not. The day is long. Should you forget later today, fear not. Pick up day day three tomorrow (if you are reading this book as part of a class, stay on the class schedule).

Friends, if one step is an intention, two steps are a commitment. Then three and four and five and suddenly a routine. Eventually you have a habit.

So, take the second step today. Then check the box. Check it with some vigor!

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Two complete

## Day Three

Today is day three of your thirty day challenge. You're ten percent through already. Wasn't that easy?

Have you been noting how you feel before and after? Remember, our brains will want to latch on to practices that make our lives better in the next ten minutes. (That's one reason we do ten minutes to start!) Are you more relaxed? Is your brain more alive? Have you felt any difference in the last three sessions? If so, write the difference down to re-enforce the feeling.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Three complete

## Day Four

Here's a made up statistic: day four is the most likely day to forget. So finish day four and feel superior about it!

We are moving a little further along, so the practice will slip your mind at some point. If today is that day, simply move on to the next. If it was yesterday, you have another chance today. If it is tomorrow, so be it. We're not looking for perfection here. We're looking for an honest commitment to spend time in God's presence.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Four complete

## Day Five

If you've already done today's guided meditation through scripture, then you've had five straight days of prayer--but also bible. While 60% of Americans read scripture, most do not encounter it as much as they would like. When was the last time you had five straight days of the bible?

One of the reasons I didn't make scripture reading one of the four habits is because it is so intertwined with the first two. This week, using a variant of the Ignatian prayer exercises, you'll have scripture every day. Next week, you'll use a single verse or phrase from scripture as an anchor in your prayer. The third week, we'll pray through the reading of scripture. Then when we tackle worship in the upcoming chapter, you'll see how closely scripture is interwoven with that enterprise.

Is prayer better than scripture reading as a daily practice? No, simply different. Some of you at the end of this challenge might prefer to read a daily devotional, or to take up the daily lectionary

(by which you'll read through scripture in a year). Both are fantastic endeavors for anyone who wishes to draw closer to God.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Five complete

## Day Six

I started this program one month before I started writing this book (and before I taught a class about these disciplines). I felt I owed it to you to work through it in the exact same way. It's a rare day that I don't talk to God somehow, but I felt I needed the daily discipline of simply being in God's presence as well. So, I did the program a little differently, starting with centering prayer.

And day six was hard for me. It's the day that almost slipped away. I started my prayer at 11:49 p.m. Just in time! If I didn't have someone to be accountable to (a future class, a future reader), I would have gone to bed. I made it through day six because of you!

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Six complete

## Day Seven

If you started this challenge with a class at my church (or on your own on a Sunday or Monday), you might find today easier since it is the weekend and you presumably have more time. However, it might also be harder because it is the weekend, and you have filled it up with lots that has to get done. It might be harder

because your normal cue for your routine is gone: you didn't have to wake up early; you're not at your office for the last ten minutes of lunch.

But today also represents the end of the first week. Won't it be nice to know you made it through the first week?

And if you didn't make it through the first week, please know that this is a religion of grace and that church is a place of grace. We're not here to make you feel bad; we're here to encourage you.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Seven complete

# CHAPTER TWO

## *worship*

IF YOU OFFERED ME THE CHOICE OF SPENDING A SUNDAY morning canoeing on a mountain lake or going to worship. I'd choose the lake. Worship or an old growth forest? I'd choose the forest. Worship or an abandoned shoreline? The shore. If you offered me the choice, however, of spending every Sunday morning out in nature or going to worship, I'd choose church. In a heartbeat.

And the reason is that the beauty of nature can render me into the presence of God, which is the primary point of worship, but a view can't pray with me when my daughter is ill. A blossoming cherry tree can remind me of God's artistry, but a tree has never once kicked me in the gut with a prophetic word from God, a word that knocked me out of my self-absorption, something I'm prone to. The majestic sweep of the mountains can create in me a feeling of generosity of spirit, but it's never actually made me a generous person. Birdsong can delight me with its purity, but I've never been rendered speechless by it, like I have by an anthem

sung by people pouring themselves out to God. And while Jesus pulled much of his imagery from the natural world, I've never once, from the natural world deduced his teachings.

There's theological talk for this: it's called natural revelation, which is that you can look at nature and assume from it a God who has created it and some general things about God, but then there's special revelation, which says it is only because religion has preserved it that we know God intends specific things for us. That is, you can't look at an ancient redwood and deduce that God so loved the world that he gave his only son. You can't study an orchid and deduce turn the other cheek. You can't meditate upon the swell of the sea and deduce love your enemies. It just doesn't work. The preservation of this special revelation is one of the primary aims of the church--and the way it gets communicated to us most profoundly is in worship.

That's why we keep going to church—week after week—so we don't go at this alone. Even when we go through dry spells and think, "I'm not getting anything out of worship right now." Even when the doctrines seem dry and the rituals lifeless. Because the dry doctrines and lifeless ceremonies are what carry this special revelation forward. To be honest, that doctrine is only dry in the abstract. In the practical, love your enemies is as wild as an old growth forest, as frightening as a roiling sea. It's anything but boring. In the practical, turn the other cheek takes intense bravery and a willingness to put yourself on the line again and again. In the practical, give what you have to the poor is the most absurd idea you will hear all year. But it's the one that can free you from the fret of money.

If I might be granted a page or two of testimony: those lifeless rituals are what makes my life meaningful. That's true for a lot of us. I know it's not for everyone. But when I confess my sin in worship, when I really confess my brokenness, when I lay before God what really tears me up, or a sense of my inability to be good, a sense of worthlessness that we all have from time to time, when I'm honest to God and I hear those words, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, be at peace.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel, in Jesus Christ you are forgiven.” When I hear them and it means that God sees the fullness of my brokenness and works to make me whole—when that actually happens, and I’m loved completely and reminded every week, of this enormous love that seeks my goodwill, when I’m fully in this moment and God is present to me, it’s one of the most beautiful things in the world. There’s nothing lifeless about it.

Or when I say the Apostle’s creed, something people have said for nearly two millennia, and I think that it is the same statement of faith that undergirded the lives of Chrysostom, of Francis, of Julian, of Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa, that I have the privilege of calling them brother, sister, that I stand with each of them as they work to make this world into a place of love. There’s nothing lifeless about it.

Or when I see a child baptized, and I make vows before God to nurture, love, and support them, these are not lifeless words. Those vows call out the best parts of me. Then, when I hear those words, ‘you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ’s own forever,” I know those same words, those words that are our identity, were spoken over me as well. There’s nothing lifeless about it.

When I hear a choir sing, and I can look into that choir and know that some of them are being crushed by a divorce, and some of them are dealing with children who can’t seem to stop drinking, and some of them are grieving a mother’s death, and some of them are wondering if they’ll be able to keep their jobs, and I hear them pour themselves out in song, then I am moved by their trust in a loving God.

When I hear a sermon, in which a preacher becomes fearless, when she dives deep into herself and looks for how God is speaking to her, when she’s unafraid of the ghosts of her own past but stands in that uncomfortable place so she can hear something beautiful that might help someone else, when she’s undaunted to stand before a congregation and compels them to a life worthy of their calling, when she’s compassionate and loving, when she’s

authentic and real, then I find myself emboldened to do the same, to be the same.

And this is why I make a habit of going to church--because it helps me find an authentic spirituality, a deep and tested spirituality. Because I need the community of saints almost as much as I need God. Because my brothers and sisters teach me to turn my attention to what has been handed on by those who have worshipped before us, to turn my attention to what is true, what is honorable, what is just, what is pure, what is pleasing, what is commendable. By directing my attention this way, worship teaches me to be attentive to God throughout my life.

### What's in it for me? (Also known as The Reward)

See the testimony above.

And here are a number of other things I find true about worship. Perhaps you will as well:

- Worship provides a space where I can be honestly present before God (which is a rare condition in our lives of keeping up appearances) and then be loved for who I truly am.

- Worship calls forth the best from me.

- Worship locates me in an ancient lineage of people who've stood for love.

- Worship strengthens my empathy for others and allows me to better connect with people.

- Worship hands down a time-tested method of finding a better life.

- Worship serves as a ritual marker of time.

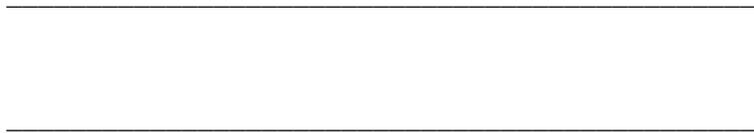
- Worship lets me see friends that I care about on a regular basis.

- Worship reminds me that life is not all about me.

- Similarly, worship reminds me life is bigger than I make it.

- Worship comforts me.
- Worship strengthens me.
- Worship lets me sing. Where else do we sing?
- Worship means I get to hear beautiful music in person.
- Worship deepens my ability to be vulnerable.
- Worship centers me in a crazy world.
- Worship compels me toward some good.
- Worship slowly erodes my prejudices or sins.
- Worship makes me feel joyful afterward.
- Worship connects me to the great other.
- Worship offers a sense of peace.
- Worship offers me a chance to say thank you to God.
- Worship means I get to think about something profound.
- Worship means I get to hear someone talk about important things in life.
- Worship gets me out of my own world.
- Going to church every week means my kids are getting some sort of faith formation.
- Some unexpected rewards: studies suggest that those who worship on a regular basis live longer and are healthier.

As you read that list of bullet points, do you see some you are drawn to? Is there a reward that resonates with you? That makes you say, “Yes! That’s why I go!”? If so, write it down here. If there are several, write them all here:



### The Cue

Sunday morning? Time to go. Is that enough of a cue for you? Is there some beloved Sunday routine you already have that could serve as a cue? Sunday breakfast, for instance? For me, it's my alarm clock on Sunday morning. From the time I wake up to the time I sit down on the couch to fall asleep watching football, I'm on. What might work for you?



### The Routine

Is there a way to do the routine better so that it's a more beneficial habit? We ask this question all the time about other routines. Is there a better way to run? Yes. Breathing a certain way makes running easier. Owning the right pair of shoes for your feet decreases some of the pain you might experience afterward. Taking some water with you might be a good idea.

Here's another habitual cycle: When I get home from work (cue), I start to cook (routine), so my family can have dinner (reward). Is there a better way to cook? Yes. There are healthier ways to cook. Olive oil is better than grease fat. Grilled meats are better than fried ones. Turkey is a good substitution for beef in a number of recipes. Sometimes changing the routine also changes the reward. I like the taste (reward) of fried chicken better than grilled chicken, but I also like feeling healthier (reward). These rewards compete.

The Cue is easy. It's Sunday morning. Time to go. The routine is easy. You sit, you speak, you sing, you listen. At our church, following the bulletin makes the process fairly easy.

Is there a way to improve the routine of worship? Yes. I could write another book about that, but here are a few easy starters:

**Prepare for worship.** Many churches, including mine, follow the lectionary, a three-year cycle of readings that cover most of the critical passages of scripture. Each Sunday has four readings--though many churches will only read two of them. You can find a list of the readings at [lectionary.com](http://lectionary.com). During the week, read the texts a few times.

Your familiarity with the texts will increase your appreciation for the sermon, the prayers, and quite often, the liturgy and the songs as well. Additionally, if the texts have stayed with you through the week, you'll probably resonate more deeply with the way a pastor has worked through the text in a similar (or wonderfully surprising) way to bring you a sermon.

**Arrive a little early.** During this second week, you'll be practicing centering prayer, a way to ground yourself in God's presence by being silent and directing your attention to God. If you are able, arrive a little early and spend time in centering prayer before worship begins. You'll find the extra time of preparation will profoundly deepen your experience of worship.

**Sing--a little out of tune and a little too loud.** I serve a church with traditional hymns and a great choir. Because the choir is so great, sometimes the rest of us are intimidated to sing. We feel like we might be out of tune, so we don't sing quite as loud. According to a number of studies, however, singing elevates several positive neurotransmitters like oxytocin, which makes us feel happier, less stressed, and provides a stronger attachment to the group around us. That's why those folks in the choir are always laughing. So sing with a little gusto next time you're in worship and your experience will be better.

**Understand the flow of worship.** All churches have a flow in worship. In mine, it's deeply related to stories in scripture about the encounters of God with people. For instance, Isaiah 6 relates the story of Isaiah standing before God in the heavenly court. It follows a basic structure: Isaiah discovers himself in the midst of worship, the angels declare the holiness and majesty of God, Isaiah is struck by his unworthiness to be there and confesses it, his sin is forgiven, God speaks, and Isaiah goes back out into the world to serve God. In worship on Sunday, we start with a call to worship, then we offer a prayer of adoration, we confess our sin before God, it is pardoned, we listen to the word of God read and then preached, and then we are sent out to serve God in the world. It's the same pattern. Read Exodus 3, and you'll see that Moses' encounter with God follows the same pattern as well. Understanding the flow of worship helps you navigate worship as an encounter with God and not simply as ritual after ritual strung randomly together.

**Take notes.** Taking notes is one of the best ways of staying engaged in a sermon. If you really want to wrestle with the ideas presented in the sermon, journal about it afterwards or engage your pastor about it at a later time.

**Assume you're there because God wants you to be there.** Surely at some point in your life you have felt the difference between being wanted in a place and being merely tolerated in a place. God wants you in worship. Many people come to church with an assumption they aren't worthy enough to be there. You'll note this was Isaiah's reaction too. But if God didn't want Isaiah there, he wouldn't have been there. God had an intention for Isaiah, and once Isaiah was able to hear it, it changed his life. Assume God has an intention for you as well, and instead of filling the hour with self-doubt, you can fill the hour with singing and prayer and laughter while seeking God's intention for you. It dramatically changes the experience.

## Strengthening the reward

If we discover there is already a reward we experience by heeding our cue and following our routine, then it's easier to associate that reward with our cue, making it a more powerful habit. It's Sunday morning, time to get up and think about something important. You can strengthen that reward a number of ways. For instance, if you love to read, give yourself carte-blanche permission to buy any book that gets mentioned in a sermon. If you love to sit in class, map out which Sunday school classes you'll take part in over the next few months. If you enjoy chewing over matters, write a weekly email to the preacher about further implications of his or her sermon. Your pastor would love it.

If one of the things you love about going to worship is that it allows you to see your friends on a regular basis, you might consider strengthening the reward by having a standing lunch date after worship with a group of friends.

If you love the music, consider joining the choir or orchestra so that your experience of it is even greater.

If being challenged to live a life for others increases your sense of purpose in life, then joining in a monthly (or weekly) service project could strengthen your participation in worship.

A question to ponder before moving on: Is there a way to strengthen some of the rewards I experience by going to worship? Consider it for a moment and write down possibilities here:

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# Day Eight

I did my prayer in a car on day eight while waiting for my daughter to finish Tae Kwon Do. You don't have to be perfect--or be in perfect surroundings--to take on this challenge! Keep going, friends! Even if it has to be in a car. (On a related note: prayer in a dedicated place tends to be much easier and more meaningful).

Today we shift from guided scriptural meditation to centering prayer. Two things that are true about centering prayer that seem to be in opposition: you can't do it wrong *and* it's a little harder to get the hang of than guided prayer.

In today's meditation (again at [waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://waynepres.org/dailymeditation)), I will help get you started, then you'll spend a number of minutes in silence with your anchor word or phrase before I close you with a short spoken prayer.

Since contemplative prayer is an intention to sit before God in silence and to be open, you can't really do it wrong unless you choose not to do it. Simply sitting is a success. Since it is grounded in silence, though, it's a little harder to get the hang of. Remember thought observance? Simply note the friendly intruders into your thoughts and let them slip away. Return to your anchor word or phrase to draw your attention back toward God. Remember to breathe deeply.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Eight complete

# Day Nine

In these daily encouragements, I've told you a little about my struggles (just finishing before midnight, prayer in the car while waiting at the Tae Kwon Do studio for my daughter) but I haven't told you yet about the benefits:

Nine days in, I noticed how calm I felt, especially while considering some elements of life that normally cause some anxiety. The day before, day eight (which included the prayer session in the car), I noticed how easily my heart was stirred for something God desired. Occasionally, while working for the church and seeing the great pain that exists in the world--poverty, divorce, abandonment, addiction, abuse, disappointment--you harden yourself a little more than you would like so it doesn't break in on you all the time (somewhat like every doctor eventually distances herself on every medical show!). Since I have begun praying in this manner, I have found that self-protective hardening to have lessened.

If you have noticed any cumulative effects of your prayers over the last week or so, jot them down here or send me an email at [cthompson@waynepres.org](mailto:cthompson@waynepres.org).

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How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Nine complete

# Day Ten

You are thirty three percent done today. Continue to note how you feel after each prayer session. We're training our brains to recognize that feeling of relaxation or peace or fulfillment or closeness to God as something that can make our lives better in the next ten minutes.

Keep noticing!

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Ten complete

# Day Eleven

For the last four days, we've practiced centering prayer. Overall, the silence gets easier and more nourishing. Overall, our minds find it easier and easier to quiet down. That's *overall*, but from day to day you will see mixed results. One day you'll feel as if the ten minutes was a breeze and few thoughts interrupted. The next day, however, might feel like a complete failure. (Next week's prayer will involve stretches of silence as well, so you'll get plenty of practice). Overall, however, it gets easier. Keep practicing.

If you've forgotten your prayer one or more days, that's okay. Start again the next day. Relapses are normal. In fact, I hope you've forgotten a day so that the pressure is off! Just stay on schedule--whether you're in a class on doing this on your own.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Eleven complete

## Day Twelve

Congratulations, you've spent twelve days in prayer and in encountering scripture. Sure, you may have missed a day or two (or three or four) but even if that's the case, you've probably significantly increased the amount of time you have spent in God's presence. This is always a good thing.

You're doing great!

Keep noting the short-term changes. During my test run of this particular program, day twelve was the day my VTA kicked in with the notion that the next ten minutes could best be served with prayer. That might have already happened for you or it might be soon to come. Pay attention! Also, keep checking the boxes. Keep praying, my friend.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twelve complete

## Day Thirteen

Today's message is short and sweet: you're doing it! Keep at it.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Thirteen complete

# Day Fourteen

Today is the last day of centering prayer. If you started this program on a Sunday (or are part of a class) that would make today Saturday, so be mindful of any changes to your cue that you have to accommodate today.

Tomorrow we start with Lectio Divina (The Divine Reading) and the last week of the guided prayers.

By the way, tomorrow you're halfway to our goal of thirty days of prayer! Didn't that go fast? (Personal note: On my fourteenth day of this challenge, I found a quicker and deeper access to a restful state than I had experienced during the challenge.)

Also, the next chapter takes up the habit of service.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Fourteen complete

# CHAPTER 3

## *service*

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” --1 Corinthians 12:4-6*

WE’RE GOING TO START THIS CHAPTER BY TALKING ABOUT THE routine of service. Obviously that is different for everyone so we’ll start by identifying some of your gifts that can undergird your particular service. This process should take about fifteen minutes. For those of you resistant to surveys like this, we’ll talk about other ways later on. So grab your pencil and let’s get started.

### Spiritual Gifts Survey

Use the provided scale to rate the extent to which each of the following 100 items describes you. Write your response in the margin next to each item. (There is another copy of this survey at the back of this book if you are sharing this with a partner.)

The scale:

3— Yes, this describes me.

2— Maybe, this sometimes describes met.

1— No, this does not describe me.

1. Organize ideas, tasks, people, and time for activities at church.
2. Use a demographic survey in planning multiple ministries.
3. Build or use other artistic abilities for sets in a drama.
4. Pray for clarity about a new option in life.
5. Call to encourage a friend to stand strong in the faith.
6. Talk about Jesus to strangers who do not know Him.
7. Rejoice in God's provision even if the checkbook is in the red.
8. Loan my car for youth retreats.
9. God has healed individuals through my involvement.
10. Notice people's needs and provide practical assistance.
11. Welcome an unexpected guest into my house.
12. Aware of Jesus' presence in my daily life.
13. Motivate groups toward specific biblical objectives.
14. Help with the emotional pain of the unemployed.
15. Enjoy singing in worship.
16. Comfortable with technology.
17. Enjoy cleaning the church kitchen once a week.
18. Responsible for the spiritual lives of Christians.
19. Find ways to make biblical content "come alive" for students.
20. Able to offer counsel to others with gentle diplomacy.
21. Make effective plans to accomplish goals.
22. Start a new ministry.
23. Use creative ability (carpentry, writing, art or drama).
24. Judge well between multiple options.
25. Use Scripture to give people help and courage.
26. Determine where friends and relatives stand spiritually.
27. Wait as long as needed for the right job opening.
28. Organize and fund an appreciation dinner.
29. God has restored wholeness to others through me.

30. Quick to help when someone has an urgent need.
31. Make strangers feel at ease at church or in my home.
32. Knowing my Redeemer personally means everything to me.
33. Lead and direct people in an important ministry.
34. Sympathize with those who are experiencing hurt.
35. Enjoy playing a musical instrument.
36. Wire or test the acoustics of the church's speaker system.
37. Set up or take down the chairs for a church banquet.
38. Nurture and disciple people.
39. Earnestly desire to explain biblical principles to others.
40. Help others through practical, effective solutions.
41. Coordinate the details necessary to meet a deadline.
42. Offer counsel and help to church leaders.
43. Make a new baptismal font for the sanctuary.
44. Look beneath the surface and perceive others' qualities.
45. Write notes to praise someone's performance.
46. Lead others to believe in Christ as their Savior.
47. Grow a garden from seed.
48. Look for new ways to give joyfully to the Lord's work.
49. Drawn to professions/ministries related to healing.
50. When disaster strikes, I feel an urgent need to assist.
51. Aware of the needs of guests.
52. Study well and am able and learn new truths.
53. Lead and direct others toward goals.
54. Work with people suffering physical or emotional problems.
55. Experience God in music.
56. Enjoy recording sermons for the internet.
57. Do dishes after a small group breakfast.
58. Guide other believers toward spiritual maturity.
59. Clarify ideas for learners through careful study.
60. Apply Christian principles to help resolve disagreements.
61. Delegate important tasks to the right people at the right time.
62. Train church leaders in many congregations.
63. Good at needlecraft work.
64. Able to help others think of a way forward.
65. Spend some time in a counseling ministry.

66. Share my beliefs in a clear and meaningful way.
67. Trust God to come through when things seem impossible.
68. Live more simply to give more to God's work.
69. Frequently focus on those needing healing when I pray.
70. Enjoy putting the needs of others before my own.
71. Introduce myself to a new neighbor.
72. Understand Scripture more easily than others.
73. Bear the brunt of criticism for a team's failure.
74. Help someone heal from the loss of a parent.
75. Comfortable reading music.
76. Computers make sense to me.
77. Stamp and fill envelopes for the church secretary.
78. Equip people to do ministry.
79. Break large concepts into understandable pieces.
80. Ignore trivial issues to solve people's dilemmas.
81. Implement projects or ministries.
82. Have a sense of authority that comes from God.
83. Express myself for God through artistic expression.
84. Perceive ramifications of a decision.
85. Help hurting people see God's answers to life's problems.
86. Listen carefully to others' beliefs before sharing yours.
87. Take a risk to try something new.
88. Pay rent for a family whose breadwinner has been laid off.
89. Respond to pain and suffering.
90. Arrive early Sunday morning to help the church staff.
91. Have a genuine appreciation for strangers.
92. Recognize easily that Biblical teachings are timeless truths.
93. Facilitate a group when it gets stuck.
94. Sense when people are hurting and ease their pain.
95. My favorite parts of worship center around music.
96. Comfortable using digital communication/social media.
97. Like doing tasks no matter how small.
98. Work to help a group bond together.
99. Discover new ideas to share with others.
100. Apply spiritual truths effectively in my own life.

## THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY SCORING GUIDE:

To find your spiritual gifts, transfer the scores for each question to the score lines below. Then add up the totals for each of these groupings of five responses:

Score 1 \_\_\_ 21\_\_\_ 41\_\_\_ 61\_\_\_ 81\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Administration  
Score 2 \_\_\_ 22\_\_\_ 42\_\_\_ 62\_\_\_ 82\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Elder  
Score 3 \_\_\_ 23\_\_\_ 43\_\_\_ 63\_\_\_ 83\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Craftsmanship  
Score 4 \_\_\_ 24\_\_\_ 44\_\_\_ 64\_\_\_ 84\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Discernment  
Score 5 \_\_\_ 25\_\_\_ 45\_\_\_ 65\_\_\_ 85\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Encouragement  
Score 6 \_\_\_ 26\_\_\_ 46\_\_\_ 66\_\_\_ 86\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Evangelism  
Score 7 \_\_\_ 27\_\_\_ 47\_\_\_ 67\_\_\_ 87\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Faith  
Score 8 \_\_\_ 28\_\_\_ 48\_\_\_ 68\_\_\_ 88\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Giving  
Score 9 \_\_\_ 29\_\_\_ 49\_\_\_ 69\_\_\_ 89\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Healing  
Score 10\_\_\_ 30\_\_\_ 50\_\_\_ 70\_\_\_ 90\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Helping  
Score 11\_\_\_ 31\_\_\_ 51\_\_\_ 71\_\_\_ 91\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Hospitality  
Score 12\_\_\_ 32\_\_\_ 52\_\_\_ 72\_\_\_ 92\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Knowledge  
Score 13\_\_\_ 33\_\_\_ 53\_\_\_ 73\_\_\_ 93\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Leadership  
Score 14\_\_\_ 34\_\_\_ 54\_\_\_ 74\_\_\_ 94\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Compassion  
Score 15\_\_\_ 35\_\_\_ 55\_\_\_ 75\_\_\_ 95\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Music  
Score 16\_\_\_ 36\_\_\_ 56\_\_\_ 76\_\_\_ 96\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Technology  
Score 17\_\_\_ 37\_\_\_ 57\_\_\_ 77\_\_\_ 97\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Service  
Score 18\_\_\_ 38\_\_\_ 58\_\_\_ 78\_\_\_ 98\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Pastoring  
Score 19\_\_\_ 39\_\_\_ 59\_\_\_ 79\_\_\_ 99\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Teaching  
Score 20\_\_\_ 40\_\_\_ 60\_\_\_ 80\_\_\_ 100\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Wisdom

### TELL ME MORE

Now that you've completed and self-scored the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, you'll notice some areas of strength. The top three scores represent your spiritual gifts. Record them here.

1. Score: \_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Score: \_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Score: \_\_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

## Understanding Your Results

**Administration.** Did you know that Paul lists “those with the gifts of administration” (1 Cor. 12:28) among the spiritually gifted? If you scored high on administration, you’re probably very good at organizing and implementing new programs or running older ones. A good administrator is as important to a church as a good pastor.

**Elder.** If you score high on this gift, it means you possess leadership qualities for helping a church, a ministry, or a disciple reach their full potential. This quality might be a spiritual depth or a strong administrative skill set (it’s not unusual for Administrator and Elder to be found together in one person).

**Craftsmanship.** You are probably very good with your hands and have an artistic quality. You can serve the church by making things that would astonish others.

**Discernment.** I often say that the Christian life is continual discernment, meaning that we must regularly be in prayer to discover God’s intention for our lives. Discerners are strong in seeing God’s intention for themselves and for others.

**Encouragement.** People with the gift of encouragement are good at helping others recognize and use their own gifts and/or persevere during difficult times. Encouragers naturally make others feel seen, valued, and cared for--whether it's a seemingly off-hand compliment, kind words during an illness or set-back, or expression of confidence in another's ability to achieve a goal.

**Evangelism.** Talking about God or Christ to others is very hard for a number of people. For some, it comes naturally. If that’s the case for you, you probably have the gift of evangelism. It’s people like you who help grow churches. Don’t let this talent lie dormant.

**Faith.** The heart of faith is trust. Those with this gift are able to remember God's good gifts from before and trust that they will happen again. This gift is invaluable in situations when we remove our personal focus from God and focus instead on our limitations. You can use it in a similar way for the larger church.

**Giving.** I've written a whole chapter on giving. It's the next one. You'll be there soon. (Most churches run on sweat, prayer, and money. If you enjoy giving, don't stop!).

**Healing.** Did you know that the Greek word for salvation is also the word for healing? That the healing of the people of God is what Jesus was about? In many churches, this gift gets overlooked in favor of ones more easily explained, but if people seek you out when they are troubled or ill, or family members tell you their loved one seems happier or improved after your visits, it's likely you have the gift of healing. Deacon ministries are especially apt for healers.

**Helping.** Helpers are doers. If someone is in need, they jump in. You'll find them on mission trips and volunteering in hospitals. Helpers find spiritual fulfillment in lending a hand, especially if it helps a person. (Here's a secret you may not know: helpers are the ones who keep the church--or the school or the non-profit or the ministry--from falling apart.)

**Hospitality.** You have the gift of making people feel welcome and at ease. You might use this within the church family to host gatherings in your home, or outside the church family to make visitors feel welcome when they come to church. Since many people come to a church when they are struggling, this is an exceptionally important job.

**Knowledge.** Knowledge as a spiritual gift refers to an ease of learning about scripture or theology (which is quite hard for many) as well as to the spiritual knowledge that comes from 'knowing' God in a truly personal way. People with this gift are

grounded in their faith and can help be grounded as well. Consider leading a small group bible study.

**Leadership.** People tend to turn toward you and trust you with the future of the church or significant projects. Accept the challenges this spiritual gift will provide you.

**Compassion.** With this gift, you can easily empathize with others. You not only recognize what someone is going through, but you can often feel what they feel as well. This gift helps others feel valued and cared for.

**Music.** I suspect this one is self-explanatory. Are you singing in the choir yet? Are you playing as part of a band? Do you organize carolers during the holidays? Music has an extraordinary capacity to move people closer to God.

**Technology.** If you have this gift, it means you are comfortable with technology. Since the church is often run by people with a deeply ambivalent care for technology, they need you. Help put together a website. Run the social media for the church. Teach your pastors and bible study leaders how to turn on their printers.

**Service.** Closely related to helping, servers are the ones who like to work behind the scenes to make sure things get taken care of. How does it differ from helping on this scale? The helpers usually respond to working with someone or helping a person. The servants tend to work with or on things (kitchens, bulletins, yard work).

**Pastoring.** If you scored high on this one, you might think about attending seminary. I won't say any more or I might scare you. (Okay, a little more. Pastors are shepherds; they like to watch out for people and help them when they can. They nurture

people toward greater spiritual maturity and help them in their relationship to God).

**Teaching.** Teachers are excited by ideas and insights and love to share them with others so that everyone might see more clearly. Historically, they have had obvious places within the church: teaching children and adult education classes or leading bible studies.

**Wisdom.** People with wisdom are the ones others naturally turn to when they're not sure what to do. This spiritual gift, often related to discernment, helps others by seeing clearly in situations where others are often too close to see with any perspective.

### Constellations of Gifts

My three highest scores were Pastoring, Teaching, and Leadership--in that order. In congress like that, you might expect to learn I lead a fairly large church--and I do.

If, instead, my three highest scores had been Pastoring, Healing and Encouragement, I'd probably be the Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care. Or if my highest scores had not included pastoring, but Knowledge, you might find me teaching at a seminary instead of where I am now.

When my wife took this survey, her highest scores were Compassion, Healing and Discernment which reflect her call as a psychologist quite well.

If Leadership, Administration and Giving show up as your highest traits, you really should be sitting on a non-profit board that does good work in the community. It would suit you well.

If your top three are Music, Compassion, and Helping, you should consider playing the piano (or organizing a choir to sing) in assisted living facilities.

Hospitality, Evangelism and Encouragement? I have a greeter team you should be a part of.

I won't list any more than those few combinations because with twenty variables and three designations, there are 6,840 combinations possible. As Paul mentions, "there are varieties of gifts."

The critical piece to figure out is where *your* gifts fit. To that end, I want to introduce you to a bit of wisdom from Frederick Buechner, a well-known theologian. He writes, "Vocation is where our greatest passion meets the world's greatest need." To paraphrase that for our purposes: "Service is where your constellation of gifts meets a great need."

So, take a moment and consider what breaks your heart out in the world. Is it school systems in disarray? Is it the proliferation of gangs? Is it children in Africa who don't receive the medication they need? Is it watching people go through divorces?

How can your constellation of gifts meet some of what breaks your heart in the world? For instance, if you have a constellation of Leadership, Administration and Compassion (which I suggested primed you for a spot on a non-profit board) and your heart breaks over childhood illnesses, you need an introduction to a local children's hospital--stat!

Once you figure out how your constellation of gifts meets the world's deep pain, you've actually figured out the Routine in the Cue-Routine-Reward cycle for service. If you need help, I'd suggest a meeting with a pastor.

## Cue

Your cue will be based on your routine. If, for instance, you decided to serve meals to those experiencing homelessness, you won't be doing that first thing in the morning. If you decided to be a Sunday school teacher, your cue won't be getting home from work or brushing your teeth at night.

You've walked through the cue process twice before now--once for prayer and once for worship. I suspect this tougher one won't cause you too much of a challenge.

## Routine

As we mentioned earlier, your routine will be the service you provide, which is based on your constellation of gifts and the place in the world where you see heartbreak.

## Reward

Are you familiar with the Warm Glow Effect? You'll hear me mention it again when we speak about yearly giving because it applies there as well. The Warm Glow Effect is that sense of happiness you experience when you help out someone else. It's a powerful feeling. It's one of the rewards we experience when we do monthly service. It's not the only one (nor the reason we do it!), but it is a wonderful feeling--akin to what people often call Christmas joy.

A more subtle reward is what happens when we sit down with people different than we are. (This is mostly a benefit of service outside of the church because people tend to go to churches with people much like themselves.) When we sit down with someone different than we are and hear their story, we often discover how similar they are to us. This opens the heart to friendships that can nurture us in ways that our existing friendships don't.

Given the right circumstances, it can also have a secondary effect on our lives: when we see someone else's struggles, especially if they don't have the resources to hide them, it awakens us to the struggles in our lives we've been ignoring--and quite often gives us the courage to deal with them.

Service becomes a way for God to interact with us while we interact with others.

Finally, if you're trying to figure out how you might fit four hours of service into your month, I'll help you re-frame it just like we did for prayer (1% of your waking day) and could have for worship (about 1% of your waking week) and say that four hours of service a month (half a Saturday) is, you guessed it, 1% of the time you spend awake each month.

If you contrast that with the average American's consumption of TV five hours a day, four hours a month in service to God is a pittance--and much more satisfying.

## Day Fifteen

The halfway mark. Are you noticing the cumulative effects of prayer yet? If not, don't worry. There could be a number of reasons you might not. And, really, we're not praying simply for the benefits it might provide us. We're praying as an offering to God. Just as you and I get benefits from giving someone we love a present (it feels really good!), we don't give the present so we can feel really good, but so the other person can feel really good or know how much we care for them or that our relationship might be strengthened. That's why we continue to pray even on days we don't feel like it.

Our VTAs, however, want the short-term benefits too--especially as we develop a behavior into a habit. So, keep paying attention to them. And your frontal lobe--which gets to make a number of your decisions too!--likes the long-term effects, so notice them when they pop up as well.

Are you feeling less irritable, for instance? Has your blood pressure gone down (unlikely after two weeks but viable for the long term)? Do you find it easier to sleep? Is your brain feeling a bit sharper? Do you feel more creative?

Our final week of guided prayer starts today with Lectio Divina. Once again, you can find the guided prayers on our website at [waynepres.org/dailymeditation](http://waynepres.org/dailymeditation)

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Fifteen complete

# Day Sixteen

You have now encountered scripture in a meaningful way for nearly every day of the last two weeks. The guided meditations and Lectio Divina are easy to understand as meaningful encounters with scripture, but it's often harder to see how centering prayer is, how the repeated saying of a singular phrase of scripture might be useful.

Have you had the experience that many people do? Did that phrase pop back into your head later in the day? If so, you're starting to see how a single phrase from scripture becomes part of you, how the Word can become flesh and dwell among us (see, we can read that metaphorically also).

If you didn't have that experience, no need to worry. One of the reasons we're practicing four types of prayers is so that you will find what suits you well.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Sixteen complete

# Day Seventeen

The next several days will recap what we covered in the first chapter. In Lectio Divina we listen for a word or phrase that "pops" because a word or phrase that has the power to speak to us in our lives is likely to draw our attention when we need it. Lectio Divina is not a process of trying to figure out a singular, best meaning to a particular scripture. Rather, it is a process of listening to how God might speak to me in a scripture.

Sometimes Christians can grow frustrated with Lectio because they want to understand what the text means (i.e. the Prodigal son

means that God loves us no matter what and will always open arms to us if we should return), but a practitioner of the prayer might get focus on the phrase “but when he came to himself” and dwell on how God is bringing them into a fuller understanding of who they are.

Relax into the prayer and trust that what you need will come to you. You are putting yourself into God’s hands after all, your creator who knows you better than you know yourself and loves you deeply.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Seventeen complete

## Day Eighteen

After listening for a word that pops, we listen to the details of the text and choose a question we would like to ask. For instance, from the prodigal son, I want to ask, “If God is the father in this parable, how does it make God feel when I turn away?” Or “Why does the father interrupt the son’s confessional?”

We are usually drawn to questions that parallel our own struggles or curiosity. By digging into them, we are addressing our own lives with the word of God. Ask the question, then see if any insights present themselves during your time of meditation.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Eighteen complete

# Day Nineteen

During the last portion of Lectio Divina, we simply sit in silence, as we have the prior week. Again, we are simply acknowledging God's presence and our desire to be in it. We try to quiet our minds and simply be present. Often, however, the prior portions of the reading and prayer practice have created a fertile ground for thought. If you are excited by an insight, feel free to engage it rather than to simply quiet your mind. The engagement is very much part of the discursive prayer that Christians engage in all the time.

How is it going? Are you still on track? If you've forgotten a day, it's okay. Move on. If you're feeling guilty about it, offer it to God in your prayer.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Nineteen complete

# Day Twenty

You are two-thirds of the way there. In two days, you'll shift away from the guided meditations and prayers into a more discursive method, the ACTS prayer. We'll touch base on this method again in the daily encouragements.

For these last two days, try to open your heart as far as you can and be receptive to God's presence. We're working beyond the short-term benefits now and moving toward the more profound practice of prayer. Today your practice may feel stale or labored, but if you will continue to commit to this prayer time, you will feel its nourishment--you will feel God in it. That is what we're after.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty complete

## Day Twenty One

Have you ever heard that if you do something every day for three weeks it becomes a habit? Well, congratulations, you've prayed every day (or most of them) for the last three weeks. During that time, you also encountered fourteen scriptures in an intentional and hopefully meaningful way. Additionally, you put another scripture (or up to seven if you changed everyday) deep into your subconscious with centering prayer.

Three weeks.

Now, to be fully honest, I can't find any empirical evidence that there is a magical three week milestone. In fact, the best study I've read suggest it takes somewhere between twenty and... wait for it... 250 days for something to become a daily habit--depending on the complexity of the habit. Luckily for us, prayer is not a complex habit. Stay the course. We'll get there together.

Tomorrow, we take up discursive prayer. You'll be off the guided prayers and leading yourself for the last nine days. You can do it. I'll continue to encourage you.

But since today is the last day you'll be guided in prayer, take a few extra moments when you're done to note what you have written after each session. After ten minutes of prayer each day for the last three weeks, are you noticing a pattern? Are you feeling more centered after prayer? Are you more attuned to your spirit? Are you feeling peaceful? Is there a pattern that has emerged?

If not, don't worry. Perhaps you're really a person for discursive prayer. That starts tomorrow.

The next chapter is about generosity--another habit that can make our lives much better.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty One complete

# CHAPTER 4

## *generosity*

ONE OF MY FAVORITE SCRIPTURE TEXTS IS ONE THAT MOST PEOPLE can't remember reading before. It's from the seventeenth chapter of Matthew:

*When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?"*

*He said, "Yes, he does." And when he came home, Jesus spoke of it first, asking, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?"*

*When Peter said, "From others," Jesus said to him, "Then the children are free. However, so that we do not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me."*

This is a terrible generosity text. I suspect that's the reason you've never heard of it. You don't have to hide the fact you've never heard of this story. It's okay. I guarantee you someone else reading this turned to the person sitting next to them and said, "That is not in the bible. He is making that up." I mean, you might know this story if you care about early Renaissance painting, like Masaccio's work 'The Tribute Money.' You might know this text if you care about Roman taxation systems. You might know this story if you care about "scriptures that talk about fish." But I suspect you don't know this story.

So, let's delve into it a bit it: collectors of the temple tax come to Peter and ask a question that's more accusation than inquiry, "Your teacher doesn't pay the temple tax, does he?" which is exactly the sort of question that a collector of the temple tax is supposed to ask. It's on his daily action plan.

Peter reacts as Peter always reacts, a little hot headed, "Of course he pays the tax, you fools." Maybe that's me reading into this. Actually, he just says, "Yes, he does." I think of it as hot headed because it's an immediate, defensive reaction, which it turns out has no basis in reality. Peter is a bulldog for Christ when scandal is in the air. "Your teacher doesn't pay the tax." "Of course, he pays the tax; don't be ridiculous. That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard. He is impeccable in every way, and the fact that you don't know that only shows your complete ignorance."

And then Peter goes home--and Jesus tells him he doesn't pay the tax. Or, rather, he asks Peter if he should pay the tax, which suggests he hasn't. But then Jesus asks a pertinent question, the question that makes this a terrible generosity text, "Do kings tax their own children?"

Peter says no.

And Jesus says, "Why should the children of the King of All that Is pay this tax?"

And this is why this is a terrible generosity text. Because it has the gall to announce the truth: "You are a child of God, and God loves you for that reason and no other. You do not have to give, you do not have to support the church, you do not have to pay your temple tax. The love of the father is unconditional."

Why am I sharing this text, again?

I share it because it's good news. And you need to hear it. The King of All that Is calls you child. You are loved, no matter what. It is the essence of the gospel, the signature of the holy, the distinctive of the divine: you are loved. End of story.

Actually, the story does continue. Jesus says to Peter, "However, so that we do not cause a scandal, go to the sea and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me."

"So we do not cause a scandal..."

It is a scandal when the child of a king, for whom everything is provided, refuses to be generous. It is a scandal when children of the Most High, who are loved unconditionally, will not love lavishly. It is a scandal when the body of Christ, the inheritors of the abundant promises of God, acts miserly. It is a scandal when the children of God represent the king as anything other than how Christ represented him--merciful, near, attentive, generous, abounding in steadfast love.

Jesus warns us not to scandalize others this way or we might shield them from the profound truth at the heart of this matter: that God loves without condition, no matter how badly we're broken, how badly we've screwed up, how badly we've damaged others; and it has nothing to do with our habits of faith. It has to do with God's character. This love is a gift.

But if we claim God is loving, and then we sit in judgment upon everyone, our scandalous behavior will keep others away. If we claim that God is generous, and then we refuse to be, our scandalous behavior will keep others away. Our scandalous

behavior might cause others to miss the truth. Those others might very well include ourselves, our spouses, our parents, our children.

Listen, the good news is that you are a child of the king, and a child of the king can be generous, prolifically generous, because the a child of the king is always provided for.

And so, let's talk about money. Generosity is not only about money, but Jesus talks about money more than anything other than God and the kingdom of God. And he does it because the way we handle money has a more profound impact on our spiritual lives than almost anything else. That is to say, when we open our wallets, we also open our hearts.

When I consider my spiritual habits, there are four that make a more profound difference than any others. (They happen to correspond to the four habits I've been teaching you about.) I preach, which means that I'm weekly engaged in praying about the word of God, trying to figure out its meaning for my life and inviting someone else to see how it means something for them.

I worship. Two chapters ago I tried to explain how important it is for me to be shaped by a community of faith that renders themselves before God every week, so God might love us and work on us.

I serve. Mission shapes us because it puts us in relationship with the people of God and makes us mindful of Jesus' commandment to love one another as he has loved us.

And then I tithe. (If you are new to the church: a tithe is a gift of ten percent of your income to the church). I want to tell you why. And I want you to believe me. This is where it's tough for ministers because we want to tell you an absolute truth: tithing will change your life, make you happier, make your spouse love you more, make you children will behave, make you thinner, make your hair grow back, and you'll receive abundant riches from on high (for those who don't know me, that last portion of that list was glib.)

We all understand that we live in a society that seeks to make us anxious so that we'll soothe that anxiety with some product. If you were thinner, more people would love you: drink Slimfast. If you were more macho, women will swoon about you, and you wouldn't be so lonely: drink Miller Lite--which doesn't make any sense but that's what the commercials say. So when I tell you something that is true: tithing will free you from anxiety over money--this is one of the great spiritual truths of the ages--you don't hear my proclaiming one of the great truths, you hear me peddling spiritual Xanax. Like all of us, your skepticism kicks in during the ad. It may be gentle skepticism--you might in favor of my perceived ulterior motive--but at some level this culture has shaped you to believe that what I'm really after is not your freedom, but your dollars to fund the church.

This is a problem. Because tithing can change your life. It has changed mine.

Here's why: much of my life had been submarined by what I call '20% more'--which works like this: if only I had 20% more income, I'd be comfortable. By the way, this problem occurred the year my wife was on a one-year internship for her Ph.D., and we made \$19,000 for the year. "If only we made \$23,000, we'd be okay." The problem reoccurred the year we made \$30,000. "If only another six grand." It was still there the year we made \$45,000. "You know, \$54,000 would mean we could save better for college." 20% more doesn't go away. People who make \$100,000 think, if only I made \$120,000 then we'd be secure. People who make \$200,000 think the same way. I once knew a woman who was deeply anxious about being able to afford sending her kids to college. She told me this in the same conversation in which I discovered her net worth was \$3 million dollars and her family income about \$250,000 a year.

That woman is not free.

It's an epidemic. 20% more is a sickness. This is not how God intends us to live.

It's been an epidemic for a long time though. Thus, long ago, God gave us a remedy. It's called ten percent less. It's not always ten. For the rich young ruler it was a hundred percent because he was deeply sick. For Zacchaeus it was fifty percent because Z knew he was sick and needed to do something, but for most of us, God gently says to us: "The antidote to twenty percent more is ten percent less. I am your God; I will provide; you will have enough. Even if the provision seems as unlikely as casting a line out into the sea to find a fish with rent money in its mouth, I will provide."

When you tithe, and you find at the end of the year that you had enough, it begins to free you from that anxiety; when you tithe, and the next year it doesn't cause you to gulp, you begin to feel a little freer; when you tithe, and you realize that money doesn't have its claws in you the way it used to; when you tithe, and you start to feel the generosity of God move through you; when you tithe, and you know that the world is becoming a more loving place because you're helping to fund the kingdom of God; when you tithe and you find that you love it, that you're more generous than you could ever have imagined; when you tithe, and the fear of enough dissipates over the years, then you begin to understand that what I'm encouraging you to do only has a little to do with funding the church and more to do with your freedom.

If I only wanted you to fund the church, I'd tell you to give until it hurts. But these habits are for you, so I'll tell you this: give until it stops hurting. Security doesn't come from All-State, it comes from being a child of the king. Those are the hands you want to be in. Do you have to give? No, God will still love you. But I don't understand why we would ever want to cause that scandal, ever suggest to someone else that the God who is so generous to me, is one that doesn't move me to be generous.

So this is how I want to encourage you: if you can't tithe now, move toward it. How about using our ubiquitous one percent? Add one percent of your income to your gift each year until you reach ten percent. If you can't tithe because you're on a fixed income, do what you can. If you can't tithe because you can't get

past the notion that I'm working you, then give what you already give to the church and then give the rest elsewhere. If you can tithe, do it. The only thing to lose is your worry.

## Yearly Giving

Why do we talk about yearly giving instead of weekly giving? Surely weekly giving would be easier to develop as a habit, right? Probably so.

But here are two reasons to talk about yearly giving instead. The first is that we're tapping into different time schedules here in order to make each habit feel a little less daunting. I can learn to exercise and to eat better, but for some reason if I have to learn to do both at the same time, it feels more daunting. So, yearly giving it is.

The second reason is more substantial. I talk about yearly giving in order that we might consider gifts significant enough that they require budgeting. What we render to God shouldn't come from what is left over but from what is primary. For this reason, our spiritual ancestors offered their *first* fruits when they made an offering. If you look at my family's budget, we have identified three financial priorities as so significant that we have the money taken directly from our paychecks, so it never even makes it into our bank account: our mortgage, our retirement, and our tithe.

It is likely, however, that in order to strengthen this habit, that most will choose to engage in it on a weekly basis. As it turns out, if you're already practicing the habit of weekly worship there's a terrific cue already in your life.

## Cue

Nearly every church I have ever known (with the exception of one) takes a moment during worship to collect a monetary offering. Usually, it's not just a monetary offering but an offering of music as well, during which you are encouraged to consider

other ways you might respond to God's grace (see: monthly service). If you have made weekly worship a habit, this will be your easiest cue.

### Routine

Also easy. As the plate goes by, drop your offering in it. If you prefer to give online, many churches will provide you with a card to drop in the plate instead.

### Reward

I'd like to share a few pieces of research about money and generosity with you. The first is this: people experience more joy when they spend on experiences rather than material items. That is, people report a much higher level of satisfaction from the family vacation than from the new couch.

Spiritual giving is usually related to experience rather than material items--either for yourself or someone else. For instance, the worship service you have come to love? It's underwritten by the gifts of those in the pews. Also, the Christmas gifts you buy for a family that might not have them otherwise is much more rewarding than the fifth, sixth, or seventh gift for your own child.

The second piece of research is not surprising for people of faith: people experience more joy when they spend on others rather than themselves. This truth is so well documented that fundraisers have a name for it (I mentioned it earlier in monthly service): the Warm Glow Effect.

If you put these two insights together, giving to the church is actually one of the most powerful things you can do to increase your own joy.

This is true no matter your income--whether you earn twenty thousand a year or a hundred thousand, but it is especially true if you're wealthy. A final piece of research reported by the American Psychological Association suggested that family incomes in excess of \$75,000 do not substantially add to the family's wellbeing or happiness. So, if you're fortunate to earn

such an income, consider that holding that extra money does almost nothing for your happiness, but giving it away increases your joy considerably.

### Strengthening the Reward

Some of these rewards are immediate, fitting nicely into the ten minute window of the VTA. The Warm Glow Effect, for instance, usually happens right away. There are ways to strengthen the reward, however.

You can (and as a pastor who oversees budgets I hesitate to suggest this) direct your giving to an area about which you care deeply. You can hand the check directly to the person who oversees a certain ministry area. Or you can visit mission sites that your money supports and learn more about the work they do.

### A final story

I once asked a man who I knew to be exceedingly generous what he loved about church, and he said, “I’m not generous by nature.” I nearly stopped him to protest, “You’re one of the most generous people I’ve ever met. I’m not sure you even understand how generous you are.” In fact, he demonstrates all the characteristics I claim that tithers have: he’s the epitome of peace (in a crowded room of anxious people, he’s the one who looks like he just walked out of two hours of prayer); he’s open-hearted; he has a sense of purpose about him; he’s grounded in faith; he’s remarkable in a number of ways. He continued before I could protest. “Church makes me generous,” he said. “I have to keep practicing.”

Now that’s an endorsement for the power of spiritual habits.

## Day Twenty Two

You're in the last week of the challenge now and moving into a different type of prayer. Today you start the ACTS prayer.

Over the next four days, you'll hear more about each movement of the ACTS prayer, but today simply remember Adoration (say things you appreciate about God), Confession (say things for which you are sorry), Thanksgiving (say things for which you are grateful), and Supplication (say things you wish would happen for yourself or others).

Set a timer for ten minutes. When you finish the discursive (talking) part of the prayer, use the remainder of the ten minutes to sit in silence. The silence might be two minutes or it might be eight. Don't worry over it. In the silence, be attentive to memories or flashes of thought that God might raise before your mind. If we say that prayer is a conversation, we must then listen for the still small voice. For many, that voice is found in mental images; for many in emotional responses. Some hear snippets of scripture; some hear the words of a song or a hymn. Just listen after you are done speaking.

You're doing great.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Two complete

## Day Twenty Three

Over the next four days, we'll revisit what we learned about the ACTS prayer in the first chapter. Adoration is a feeling of profound love, respect, admiration. When we begin the ACTS

prayer, we start with a statement of adoration. Essentially it is anything you might say to someone you deeply love about why you love them:

“Gracious God, you join me when I feel alone. You lift up those who feel low. You comfort those who are grieving. When I lost my job and didn’t know what to do, you sent me people who could help me. You are, indeed, the best we could hope for...”

Or: “Gracious God, you are the one who made the heavens and the earth, the one who spins the planets and lights the suns on fire. You made the fine mechanics of a fly’s wings as well as the grandeur of the great canyons...”

Adoration does not need to be poetic. Just honest and something that you love about God.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Three complete

## Day Twenty Four

Why do we confess when we pray? Because we feel that we can not be honestly present to others when we are keeping secrets from them. Consider your own life; consider some time you held a secret from a friend. Were you able to be with them comfortably without confessing it? Probably not.

That’s one of the reasons we confess.

Another reason? God is the one who can create something whole out of something we might have broken. Is there someone better to tell? Not really.

Tell the truth in your prayer, and have a little grace for yourself in the process. God knows the depth of the human heart and loves us just as we are.

You're doing great, and I'm glad you've taken this prayer journey with me.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Four complete

## Day Twenty Five

You're five-sixths of the way through! Only five days left. Are you still writing down how you feel before and after? If not, try it a few more times. If so, that's great. It'll help seal the short-term benefits in your mind, which hopefully will give your VTA a little nudge as your brain considers its short-term behaviors in the future.

Thanksgiving is probably the simplest of the four sections of the ACTS prayer for me. Thank you for my family. Thank you for my church. Thank you for meaningful work. Thank you for the people you have brought into my life who care for me. Thank you for scripture, which I love to play with. Thank you...

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Five complete

## Day Twenty Six

Supplication is an act of trusting that God is good all the time. We don't make supplications because we lack trust in God to care for us without a reminder or because we expect God to fix everything right away like a cosmic handyman but because we wish to express to God our deep love for our family ("Please help mom through this cancer"), our friends ("Jane is struggling with work right now"), our community ("Lord, we're having a terrible time in the high school with drinking"), and our world ("I'm really concerned about the unrest in Egypt"). Supplication helps make our hearts supple.

Do our prayers move God to action? That's a hard one for people who trust that God is in control of all (one of the basics for Presbyterians like me) and that God's intentions are already known, but Jesus told us to be persistent in our supplications. So, I will trust there is great value in them.

Four more days to complete the 30 day challenge?

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Six complete

## Day Twenty Seven

Keep it up! Keep jotting down how you feel before and after.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Seven complete

## Day Twenty Eight

On this last day of discursive prayer, I want to ask if you've noticed a difference in how you feel before and after as opposed to the more meditative silent prayers we did the first three weeks? Tomorrow, you may choose any of the sorts of prayer we've already practiced--or you may choose to journal about this experience. And don't forget to join someone for worship.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Eight complete

## Day Twenty Nine

Today your program is over. To top it off, you may pray in any way you would like today. Let's recap though. You spent a week in guided scriptural meditation, a week in contemplative centering prayer, a week in Lectio Divina, and a week praying the ACTS prayer. You're practically a prayer genius now. Okay, perhaps not, but you are now experienced with several different sorts of prayer.

At the end of this book is a list of resources that might help you in your continued practice.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Twenty Nine complete

# Day Thirty

This is your last day, but I hope not your last prayer. Spend some time today thinking about your experience. Do you wish to continue? You have all the tools you need.

How I felt before prayer:

How I felt after prayer:

Day Thirty complete

## Habit Keeping Resources

Here are some resources that might be useful as you support your new prayer habits.

**Guided Prayer.** Websites: [www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org) includes meditations for each day with music and time for reflection.

[www.d365.org](http://www.d365.org) is a site that includes music, scripture reading, written meditation, and prayer. You can also sign up for a daily email at no cost.

**Book:** An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer: Scriptural Reflections According to the Spiritual Exercises, by Timothy M. Gallagher. This book includes forty meditations using guided prayer method we used in the first week.

**Centering Prayer.** A pamphlet entitled, “The Method of Centering Prayer: The Prayer of Consent” by Thomas Keating is available from [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org)

**Books:** Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel, by Thomas Keating

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, by Cynthia Bourgeault

Both books offer background, practical application and in depth discussion of centering prayer.

**Lectio Divina.** Book: Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina, by Thelma Hall. Includes instruction on the method of Lectio Divina as well as 500 scripture texts.

**Daily Lectionary.** Visit [lectionary.com](http://lectionary.com) or [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org) and click on the link at the top, “Follow the Lectionary” to subscribe to a daily email with the lectionary or the podcast, Hear the Word, where the lectionary is read aloud. The lectionary is useful for guided or centering prayer.

## Spiritual Gifts Survey

Use the provided scale to rate the extent to which each of the following 100 items describes you. Write your response in the margin next to each item.

The scale:

3—Yes, this describes me.

2—Maybe, this sometimes describes me.

1—No, this does not describe me.

1. Organize ideas, tasks, people, and time for activities at church.
2. Use a demographic survey in planning multiple ministries.
3. Build or use other artistic abilities for sets in a drama.
4. Pray for clarity about a new option in life.
5. Call to encourage a friend to stand strong in the faith.
6. Talk about Jesus to strangers who do not know Him.
7. Rejoice in God's provision even if the checkbook is in the red.
8. Loan my car for youth retreats.
9. God has healed individuals through my involvement.
10. Notice people's needs and provide practical assistance.
11. Welcome an unexpected guest into my house.
12. Aware of Jesus' presence in my daily life.
13. Motivate groups toward specific biblical objectives.
14. Help with the emotional pain of the unemployed.
15. Enjoy singing in worship.
16. Comfortable with technology.
17. Enjoy cleaning the church kitchen once a week.
18. Responsible for the spiritual lives of Christians.
19. Find ways to make biblical content "come alive" for students.
20. Able to offer counsel to others with gentle diplomacy.
21. Make effective plans to accomplish goals.
22. Start a new ministry.
23. Use creative ability (carpentry, writing, art or drama).
24. Judge well between multiple options.
25. Use Scripture to give people help and courage.

26. Determine where friends and relatives stand spiritually.
27. Wait as long as needed for the right job opening.
28. Organize and fund an appreciation dinner.
29. God has restored wholeness to others through me.
30. Quick to help when someone has an urgent need.
31. Make strangers feel at ease at church or in my home.
32. Knowing my Redeemer personally means everything to me.
33. Lead and direct people in an important ministry.
34. Sympathize with those who are experiencing hurt.
35. Enjoy playing a musical instrument.
36. Wire or test the acoustics of the church's speaker system.
37. Set up or take down the chairs for a church banquet.
38. Nurture and disciple people.
39. Earnestly desire to explain biblical principles to others.
40. Help others through practical, effective solutions.
41. Coordinate the details necessary to meet a deadline.
42. Offer counsel and help to church leaders.
43. Make a new baptismal font for the sanctuary.
44. Look beneath the surface and perceive others' qualities.
45. Write notes to praise someone's performance.
46. Lead others to believe in Christ as their Savior.
47. Grow a garden from seed.
48. Look for new ways to give joyfully to the Lord's work.
49. Drawn to professions/ministries related to healing.
50. When disaster strikes, I feel an urgent need to assist.
51. Aware of the needs of guests.
52. Study well and am able and learn new truths.
53. Lead and direct others toward goals.
54. Work with people suffering physical or emotional problems.
55. Experience God in music.
56. Enjoy recording sermons for the internet.
57. Do dishes after a small group breakfast.
58. Guide other believers toward spiritual maturity.
59. Clarify ideas for learners through careful study.
60. Apply Christian principles to help resolve disagreements.
61. Delegate important tasks to the right people at the right time.

62. Train church leaders in many congregations.
63. Good at needlecraft work.
64. Able to help others think of a way forward.
65. Spend some time in a counseling ministry.
66. Share my beliefs in a clear and meaningful way.
67. Trust God to come through when things seem impossible.
68. Live more simply to give more to God's work.
69. Frequently focus on those needing healing when I pray.
70. Enjoy putting the needs of others before my own.
71. Introduce myself to a new neighbor.
72. Understand Scripture more easily than others.
73. Bear the brunt of criticism for a team's failure.
74. Help someone heal from the loss of a parent.
75. Comfortable reading music.
76. Computers make sense to me.
77. Stamp and fill envelopes for the church secretary.
78. Equip people to do ministry.
79. Break large concepts into understandable pieces.
80. Ignore trivial issues to solve people's dilemmas.
81. Implement projects or ministries.
82. Have a sense of authority that comes from God.
83. Express myself for God through artistic expression.
84. Perceive ramifications of a decision.
85. Help hurting people see God's answers to life's problems.
86. Listen carefully to others' beliefs before sharing yours.
87. Take a risk to try something new.
88. Pay rent for a family whose breadwinner has been laid off.
89. Respond to pain and suffering.
90. Arrive early Sunday morning to help the church staff.
91. Have a genuine appreciation for strangers.
92. Recognize easily that Biblical teachings are timeless truths.
93. Facilitate a group when it gets stuck.
94. Sense when people are hurting and ease their pain.
95. My favorite parts of worship center around music.
96. Comfortable using digital communication/social media.
97. Like doing tasks no matter how small.

- 98. Work to help a group bond together.
- 99. Discover new ideas to share with others.
- 100. Apply spiritual truths effectively in my own life.

**THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS INVENTORY SCORING GUIDE:**

To find your spiritual gifts, transfer the scores for each question to the score lines below. Then add up the totals for each of these groupings of five responses:

- Score 1 \_\_\_ 21\_\_\_ 41\_\_\_ 61\_\_\_ 81\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Administration
- Score 2 \_\_\_ 22\_\_\_ 42\_\_\_ 62\_\_\_ 82\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Elder
- Score 3 \_\_\_ 23\_\_\_ 43\_\_\_ 63\_\_\_ 83\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Craftsmanship
- Score 4 \_\_\_ 24\_\_\_ 44\_\_\_ 64\_\_\_ 84\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Discernment
- Score 5 \_\_\_ 25\_\_\_ 45\_\_\_ 65\_\_\_ 85\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Encouragement
- Score 6 \_\_\_ 26\_\_\_ 46\_\_\_ 66\_\_\_ 86\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Evangelism
- Score 7 \_\_\_ 27\_\_\_ 47\_\_\_ 67\_\_\_ 87\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Faith
- Score 8 \_\_\_ 28\_\_\_ 48\_\_\_ 68\_\_\_ 88\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Giving
- Score 9 \_\_\_ 29\_\_\_ 49\_\_\_ 69\_\_\_ 89\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Healing
- Score 10\_\_\_ 30\_\_\_ 50\_\_\_ 70\_\_\_ 90\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Helping
- Score 11\_\_\_ 31\_\_\_ 51\_\_\_ 71\_\_\_ 91\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Hospitality
- Score 12\_\_\_ 32\_\_\_ 52\_\_\_ 72\_\_\_ 92\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Knowledge
- Score 13\_\_\_ 33\_\_\_ 53\_\_\_ 73\_\_\_ 93\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Leadership
- Score 14\_\_\_ 34\_\_\_ 54\_\_\_ 74\_\_\_ 94\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Compassion
- Score 15\_\_\_ 35\_\_\_ 55\_\_\_ 75\_\_\_ 95\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Music
- Score 16\_\_\_ 36\_\_\_ 56\_\_\_ 76\_\_\_ 96\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Technology
- Score 17\_\_\_ 37\_\_\_ 57\_\_\_ 77\_\_\_ 97\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Service
- Score 18\_\_\_ 38\_\_\_ 58\_\_\_ 78\_\_\_ 98\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Pastoring
- Score 19\_\_\_ 39\_\_\_ 59\_\_\_ 79\_\_\_ 99\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Teaching
- Score 20\_\_\_ 40\_\_\_ 60\_\_\_ 80\_\_\_ 100\_\_\_ = \_\_\_: Wisdom

**TELL ME MORE**

Now that you've completed and self-scored the Spiritual Gifts Inventory, you'll notice some areas of strength. The top three scores represent your spiritual gifts. Record them here.

1. Score: \_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Score: \_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Score: \_\_\_\_ Spiritual gift: \_\_\_\_\_

See page 52 to help understand your results.