

Going Deeper — 3 Prayer Practices to Grow Your Faith (from *Spiritual Direction* by Henri Nouwen)

Practice 1: Carving Out Space for Silence and Solitude with God

Directions: Try the following exercise for ten minutes a day. If you find yourself getting distracted or feeling like you're not getting anything out of it, stick with it anyway! As you learn to set aside time for silence and develop a greater awareness of God's presence, you will find that He ushers you into a more peaceful, spiritual way of living.

1. Simply set apart a specific time and place to spend alone with God. What time of the day will you pray, and where will you pray? Write it here: _____
2. Add to your specific time and place a *single* focus. This can be an image, a word, a phrase of scripture, or a short meditative prayer that is repeated.
3. When distractions come or you feel anxious or sleepy, acknowledge the distraction—don't fight it—then simply return to your image, phrase, or scripture.
4. Embrace the silence between repetitions in prayer. This is how you create space for God to be present.
5. Sometimes, without our sacred time and place and focus, God speaks a simple word for us to hear. Learn to listen to that still, small voice.

Practice 2: Contemplative Prayer & Meditation

Directions: This exercise challenges you to develop a discipline of contemplative prayer and meditation—a way to “be still and know” in your heart that God is with you, God is personal, and God is looking for you right where you are. Elijah did not experience the presence of God in a mighty wind, powerful earthquake, or consuming fire, but in a still, small, gentle voice (1 Kings 19:9-13).

In Psalm 46, God delivered the sons of Korah (from the Levites, a tribe set apart for special service) from roaring mountains and raging waters that threatened to take their life. “God was their refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, they did not fear. Instead, they sang and became still. They listened for God’s whisper. The practice of contemplative prayer and meditation makes us more sensitive to God’s whisper” (Nouwen, 82).

Read the following passage, A Guided Meditation on Psalm 46:10, in solitude—or listen as someone else reads it to you.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still: Be quiet...Be silent...Be tranquil. Be present...Be now...Be here...

The first task of the disciple is to be with the Lord...to sit at His feet, to listen and to be attentive to all He says, does, and asks.

Our Lord is all we need and want...Our stronghold, our refuge, our shepherd, our wisdom. God cares for us, feeds us...gives us life...

Be still...It is hard...It means to let God speak to us...breathe in us...act in us...pray in us...Let God enter into the most hidden parts of our being...let God touch us even where it may hurt us and cause us pain...

To be still is to trust...to surrender...to let go...to have faith.

Be still...God is and God acts...not once in a while...not on special occasions...but all the time...Be still and listen to the one who speaks to you always, feel the actions of the one who acts always...and taste the presence of the one who is present always.

Know: Come to know...real knowledge...full intimate knowing.

A form of diagnosis...a knowing through and through. A knowing with the heart, a knowing by heart...Be still and know.

Come to that still knowledge. There is a very restless knowledge, a confusing, distracting, dividing knowledge...but knowing God...is a knowing of the heart...of the whole person. It is a knowing that is also seeing, hearing, touching, smelling.

Be still and know that I am God.

That is not meant to be a fearful knowledge...but a peaceful knowledge. God is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living, God is not a revengeful God, but a God of Love. Know that I am God...your God. The God who is only love...the God who touches you with his limitless and unconditional love.

*Be still and know that I love you...*that I hold you in the palm of my hand...that I have counted the hairs of your head...that you are the apple of my eye...that your name is written in my heart...“Do not be afraid...it is I.”

There is nothing in us that needs to be hidden from God’s love. Our guilt...our shame...our fear...our sins...He wants to see it, touch it, heal it...and make himself known. There is no other God than the Lord of Love.

Be still and know that I am God. God is not in the storm, nor in the earthquake, nor in fire, but in the still, small voice, the gentle breeze, and the sheer silence...

Be still and know that I am God. Take these words with you in the week to come....let them be like a little seed planted in the good soil of your heart and let it grow...

Be still and know that I am God.

Closing Prayer: O Lord, I know now that it is in silence, in a quiet moment, in a forgotten corner of my heart that you will meet me, call me by name, and speak a word of peace. Let me be still and know you by name. Amen.

Practice 3: Lectio Divina

Directions: Choose a passage of scripture to read aloud, slowly, attentively, once through. Pause to let the passage sink in. Resist a familiar understanding, even of a familiar passage. Allow yourself to hear the story anew.

Reread the passage, piece by piece. Note the story line and questions raised. Again, resist the familiar interpretation. Look for a word or two in the story. Explore the passage the way a child might explore a strange room, in the spirit of curiosity and openness.

Reread the passage a third time. What word or words jump out at you, commanding your attention? Stay with that word as long as you can. Meditate on it. Chew on it. Is God speaking a personal word to you today? Contemplate the personal word for you today in the written Word. Live today in the joy that the Living Word has spoken to you.

When time allows, open your journal, and record your spiritual insights. Reconsider the scripture and the words that commanded your attention through *Lectio Divina*. How do its questions connect with your own questions?

How do you experience God as you listen to the Word? Where do you discern the healing hand of God touching you through the Word? How are your sadness, grief, and mourning being transformed at this very moment through the Word? Do you sense the fire of God’s love purifying your heart and giving you new life?

As thoughts come to you, joy them down on paper—perhaps just a word or two at first, then phrases or sentences as your reflections become more developed. Try to capture specifics rather than just general themes. You may find that in response to new insights, new ways of acting in familiar situations present themselves. In the same way, you may be troubled by portions of scripture that leave you confused, uneasy, with a feeling of dissonance. These can prove to be as valuable, in ways that are not immediately obvious, as those portions that are more obviously related. Note them as well.

When the time has come to end your quiet time, be refreshed. Close with prayer, bearing in mind the questions and insights that have come to you today. Give thanks and invite God’s presence into your life’s movements in the day ahead.

Reference: Nouwen, Henri J. M, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006.