



SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Gratitude Practice



Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. (Philippians 4:4-7 MSG)

In this season, worry and anxiety are at an all-time high. Even if you don't normally find yourself struggling with anxiety, it's probably making its way into your mind, heart, and especially your body.

Maybe it's not showing up in the form of anxious thoughts, but it's sneaking into your sleeping patterns or your desire to control outcomes. Perhaps you've found yourself escaping more or a bit more on edge with those in your house, snapping at things that wouldn't normally bother you.

All these things can be a result of heightened anxiety. It's certainly understandable considering all we're facing right now. Fortunately for us, Paul invites us to name our worries and anxieties in the presence of a loving God, who invites us to shape them into prayers.

God welcomes our worries. He desires us to bring all of who we are into his presence. We can bring our sadness, our frustration, our disappointments, our fears—anything overwhelming us—and lay it at his feet. He will gladly shoulder the burdens we carry.

Paul shares two practices in Philippians 4:4-7 that shape us as we bring these burdens and worries before God. God will comfort regardless, but these two things will shape us significantly.

Paul calls us to rejoicing and to gratitude.

Praise and thanksgiving shape us. When we remember who God is, it alters our perspective. While these may not fix our problems or change our circumstances, they will shift our mindset and bring us into a more intimate relationship with our Loving Father.

Today we're going to look at the practice of Gratitude. Don Postema writes, "Gratitude recognizes that a gift has been given, a favor has been done by someone. There is a gift and a giver. But there is more. Gratitude also calls for a response to that gift. We thank the giver with an expression of appreciation—a handshake, a hug, a note. A gesture of gratitude completes the exchanges, closes the circle, lets the love flow back to the giver...Actually, the exchange is more like a spiral than a circle—a spiral in which the giver gets thanked and so becomes the receiver, and the joy of giving and receiving rises higher and higher."

The author goes on to describe it like this:

A Mother bends down to her child in his crib and hands him a rattle. The baby recognizes the gift and returns the mother's smile. The mother, overjoyed with the childish gesture of gratitude, lifts the child up with a kiss. There is our spiral of joy. Is not a kiss a greater gift than a toy? Is not the joy it expresses greater than the joy that set our spiral in motion?

He shares, "The gesture of thanks moves both the giver and receiver to another level. It expresses a unity; it solidifies a relationship. We start out with a giver, a gift, and a receiver, and we arrive at the embrace of thanks."

As we practice gratitude, it grows our intimacy and awareness of God. Maybe you're not feeling exceptionally grateful lately. The beauty is that you don't have to feel grateful to practice gratitude. As you practice gratitude, it will change your perspective, still growing intimacy with God and eventually, your feelings will follow.

Gratitude won't erase your anxiety, but it can help some by offering another vantage point. There is a reason Paul included "with thanksgiving" in his instructions to the Philippians. He knew how gratitude changes us.

As you have conversations with your family, invite your children or students to join you as you collect thanks throughout the day. It might be that you started a "Blessings Jar" back during December when our Children's Ministry did Family Christmas Boxes. This would be a great time to dust those off and start adding to them.

Spiritual Practice

We would invite you to discuss these questions as a family or if you are quarantined alone, make a connection with a friend and walk through these together. If that's not possible, you can journal your answers and share them with someone at a later time.

When was a time when someone thanked you and it meant a lot to you?
When was a time when you were not thanked? How did that make you feel?

Read Luke 17:11-19, the story of the ten lepers.

Imagine yourself as one of the nine lepers who DID NOT return to thank Jesus. Why didn't you return to thank Jesus?

Imagine yourself as the one leper who DID return to give thanks. Why did you return? What was it like?

What are some specific ways you can “return thanks” to Jesus (gestures of gratitude)?

Take time at the end of the day, perhaps at dinnertime or bedtime, to share the ways you have seen God move throughout the day. Write them down somewhere—in a journal, on pieces of paper. Make a family “gratitude” wall or start your own “blessings jar” by putting each of the moments down on paper or post-it notes you want to give thanks to God. Be specific. Take time to write why you are thankful and how that gift from God affected you. Include ways you want to praise God for his character and nature, not just thanking him for specific provisions, but also for the ways He is loving you right now.

Decide how often you want to pull things from the jar and read them. Weekly during your Sabbath time? As the month ends? Maybe as anxiety hits you, pull a few of those gifts out of the jar or revisit that journal and review the ways God has shown up.

Our loving Father desires to give us good gifts, at times we’re just looking the wrong direction. Let’s ask for eyes wide open to see how He is pouring out His love over us in this season.

Loving Father, open our eyes to see your goodness. Give us a new perspective that allows Your peace to flood our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies. Grow gratitude in us so it’s our default mindset. May we always return thanks to you. Show us where you are giving good gifts. Amen.

DON'T *worry* ABOUT
ANYTHING; INSTEAD *pray*
ABOUT EVERYTHING TELL
GOD *what you need* AND
thank him FOR ALL HE
HAS DONE. THEN YOU WILL
EXPERIENCE *God's peace*
WHICH *exceeds* ANYTHING
WE CAN UNDERSTAND. HIS
PEACE WILL GUARD YOUR
hearts & minds AS YOU
live IN CHRIST JESUS.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7