

A Guide
to Spiritual
Rhythms

BE THE GARDENER OF MY SOUL

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

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



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INTRODUCTION TO SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS

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

— Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

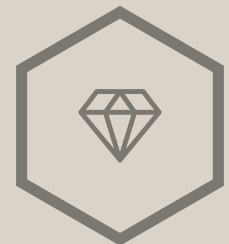
As Christ followers, our desire is to become more and more like the one we follow. Becoming like Christ always takes radical intentionality.



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



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



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

PRACTICE HIS WAYS

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

WEEK 1

MEDITATION

A slowing down in order to give undivided attention to God

WEEK 2

PRAYER

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

WEEK 3

SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

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

WEEK 4

FASTING

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

WEEK 5

SABBATH

A regular day set aside for worship and rest

WEEK 6

CONFESSION

A surrender of weaknesses and faults so transformation can occur

WEEK 7

SIMPLICITY

A loosening of attachments to focus on what really matters

GETTING STARTED

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

doing noun

do·ing | \ \ 'dü-ıŋ \

Definition of *doing*

1: the act of performing or executing : ACTION

apprentice noun

ap·pren·tice | \ ə-'pren-təs \

Definition of *apprentice*

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

rhythm noun

\ 'ri-t_həm \

Definition of *rhythm*

1: an ordered recurrent alternation of strong and weak elements

SPIRITUAL DOING

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

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

— Unknown

SPIRITUAL APPRENTICESHIP

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

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

— Richard Foster

SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS

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

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

— Aj Sherrill

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

— John Mark Comer

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Assess the status of your current spiritual health.

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

Engage in the weekly rhythm.

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

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

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

Discern which spiritual rhythms are vital to your spiritual growth.

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

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

— Richard Foster

SPIRITUAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT*

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

Fill out the chart below using the following guide:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MEDITATION

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

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

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

SYNOPSIS:

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

GOD-GIVEN FRUIT:

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

EXAMPLES:

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

BASELINE SUGGESTION:

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

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is your gut reaction to the word meditation?

How would you characterize your ability to pay attention?

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

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

RHYTHM PLAN

What:

When:

Where:

RESOURCES

ALL RHYTHMS:

Celebration Of Discipline by Richard J Foster

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adee Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit Of The Disciplines by Dallas Willard

Practicingtheway.org

MEDITATION:

New Seeds Of Contemplation by Thomas Merton

Here And Now: Living In The Spirit by Henri Nouwen

Devotional Classics by Richard Foster