My *Everyday* Life with God
Everyday God invites us into the flow of moving inward in our personal exercises of growth, outward to our homes, work and communities to share life together with others. These rhythms are what lead us to experiencing a fulfilling life with God.

There is a rhythm of engagement and withdrawal, work and rest, dispensing and recharging, crowds and solitude. Not rules or law...but pathways to life in which your rhythm is created with God.

Os Guiness, *The Call*
My Everyday Life with God

Name:
__________________________________________

Contact information:
__________________________________________

This part of my everyday life story
from:______________ to ________________
Introduction to Your Everyday Life With God

Everyday we have the opportunity to experience a meaningful life with God; yet so many of us miss it. We miss it because we too easily segregate life into the categories of spiritual and secular. We say that secular is the world around us, often referred to as the “Real World” and spiritual is what we “do” in church or what we say when we pray and it is often referred to as “Other Worldly,” or not as real as the “Real World.”

But does God really separate our living into secular and spiritual? Can it be that “doing” our daily jobs is just as spiritual as “doing” our prayers or “going” to church? By giving ourselves fully to our work aren’t we being highly spiritual? When we pray or attend church, isn’t it our “secular” selves that we bring to those times?

There is great freedom to be found when we get to the place of seeing that all of life belongs together. For no matter where we are there is God; not a God who loves us more when we are “acting” spiritual and who loves us less when we are “being” “secular,” but a God who cannot divide our goodness from our badness. God holds it all together and loves us unconditionally.

This book has been created in such a way as to lead you into discovering, deepening, and celebrating your everyday life with God. By itself this book can do nothing for you. But if you are willing to practice the exercises that it contains, then you will find yourself becoming more sensitive to the God’s gracious and loving spirit in your everyday life.

The more you feel and know God’s gracious and loving spirit, the more you will become a person of love and grace to others and even yourself. Jesus is our prime example. He knew and felt God’s presence so much that he saw himself as being one with God. This closeness that Jesus experienced came through his regular practice of spiritual exercises. By regularly practicing some of the same exercises you too can have an intimate closeness, oneness, with God and others.

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Romans 12:1-2, The Message
This book contains five spiritual exercises for you to do daily and then eleven additional spiritual exercises that you can do on retreat time away, periodically throughout the year as needed, with your family, or with your small group. There will be times when one or more of the eleven additional exercises will be the most important exercise for you to practice. Sometimes the matters of day to day living become so big that they seem insurmountable and the only way through them is through some practice of a deeper exercise. Make sure you read through them and then put them into practice as needed.

However, nothing can replace the powerful transforming affect of practicing daily spiritual exercises. In many ways, they prepare us for the deeper exercises.

The daily spiritual exercises in your book are separated into morning and evening. There are four exercises to practice in the morning and one in the evening. The morning exercises are to awaken you to the presence of God as you begin your day with prayer and scripture reading. The evening exercise is to help you look over your day and recount how it was that you experienced God in the past 12 hours of the day.

Each exercise is introduced and then explained as to how to do it. Then you will find blank pages for you to reflect in whatever way you feel best. You may want to write or you may want to draw. Once you get into the rhythm of daily practicing these exercises, they will become second nature to you. They will become a trusted friend that you won’t want to go through your day without.

The book is small enough for you carry to around with you so that you can practice the exercises wherever it is most convenient for you to do so. Once the pages are full it is recommended that you store the book away in a place that is easily accessible so that over the coming months and years you can refer back to it and see how you have deepened, discovered, and celebrated in your everyday life with God. All you need to do to keep the exercises going is start a new book.

Like all exercises, these spiritual exercises are only as good as you practice them. If you exercise them daily, you will discover how amazing your everyday life with God really is.

These daily exercises will lead you to seeing the reality of Psalm 23:6; The Message

[God] your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.
When we think about God’s story and then our own it is easy for us to think that they are two radically different stories – there is God’s story in the Bible which is Holy and divine and then there is our story that seems to be neither Holy or divine. Yet the truth is our stories are not separate stories at all. Our story is just as special as any other story we read in the Bible. And our story is a continuation of the biblical story that reveals God’s relentless pursuit of any and all of us.

The story line has not changed in all these many years. It goes something like this. God loves us, gives us life and we love God. Then we become attracted to other gods and we forsake the one who loves us and head off in some other direction. That doesn’t stop God from loving us or pursuing us. Pursue us he does and until we are captured again by an unprecedented love. Then we fall away again and again God comes after us. That is the basic story line that was written in the beginning and continues to be written through the stories of our lives now.

This story line is important to know because it gives us hope for the future. But the only way we can really appreciate the story is to know it well and also know how it has been, and still is, that God is meeting us along the way.

What follows is a brief telling of the biblical story. It is included here in the front of the journal because it is vitally important to know upfront this story of God’s relentless love and to also know your connection to it.

This book will be a way for you to stay in touch with your God story. As you write your gratitude to God each day, as you pray for those needing your prayers, as you prayerfully reflect on the scripture readings and write out those reflections in your book, as you spend time in silence and listening for God and then write down what comes to you in your examen each day you are adding your part to God’s beautiful love story that never ends.

Through you the story of God’s relentless love continues to be written and told. It is this story of God’s love in you that others are eager to hear.
Marking God’s and Our Love Story

The Bible is full of stories that help us understand who God was, is, and will forever be. These stories also reveal who we are in relationship to God. From beginning to end, the Bible shows us how God’s love and grace are always directed to human creation.

These stories are not just ancient myths having little if any meaning for our lives today. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is as much our story as it is the stories of Adam, Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Judas, Mary, Jesus, Phoebe and Paul. These people, full of love and hatred all at the same time, represent each of us in our own mixture of good and evil. Just as they struggled with knowing how to receive God’s unconditional love and then give unconditional love away to others, so do we.

It is in this ongoing struggle to love and be loved that we are invited into the biblical story unafraid. We are unafraid because just as God captured and recaptured, healed and healed again the broken lives found in the pages of scripture, so God continues to capture and heal our own lives today.

The story begins in a garden where love is coupled with free will. Free will because that is one of the greatest expressions of a deep and abiding love. If love does not set us free, then it is not real love. Yet, at the same time it is this gift of free will, this ability to choose for ourselves that often gets us into our deepest troubles. From the beginning of human history we have repeatedly chosen to love ourselves more than God. We choose to leave the garden of intimacy with God and creation, in order to strike out on our own and become our own little gods. It is this journey into selfish love that continues to divide us from one another and from God.

This story does not end here. For all who see themselves in this story, it is good news. It reveals a loving God whom Saint Augustine described as being like the hounds of heaven that are forever on our trails. The point being, even our own willful separation from God, cannot change the will of God from pursuing us in love.

God’s love is not just an abstract echoing from the sky. God’s love is made real through real people - people who have responded to a call from God, to help lead others on a spiritual journey that introduces them to this relentless God of love and graceful purpose.

The people whom God has called to lead us in this way include Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Ruth, Esther, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and many others. They were led from the Land of Ur to the forming of a new nation called Israel – God’s chosen people to be God’s incarnate presence to other nations. They led people from slavery in Egypt, on through the desert, and into the Promised Land. They continued to lead as judges and priests who spoke for God, and as kings who ruled

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with power and might. From the Temple in Jerusalem, they were led out as exiles in a foreign land. Through it all God never stopped showing unconditional love, yet in spite of this love the people continued to choose their own way over God’s way.

While in exile, a remnant group of people formed. They hoped, believed, and prayed for the coming of a Messiah, a Savior to come and rescue them. Even while being far away from home they never forgot the stories of God’s love. Day after day, they prayed for and preached about a day when God would send the Messiah.

That day came hundreds of years later in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Mysteriously, the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in the womb of his earthly mother, Mary. In that act, we once again see God coming to meet us in human flesh. Jesus came to us, fully human and fully God – the true embodiment of God’s original creation when God created us in God’s image.

After Jesus’ birth he too was exiled. When he returned home, he grew up in a lower middle class family. He began his public ministry through the waters of baptism where he was declared to be the Beloved Son of God. He then spent 40 days in the desert fasting and praying. During this time, he was immersed into the full human experience. Repeatedly he was tempted to love himself - his power, his prestige, and his possessions - more than he loved God. Every time Jesus refused to bow to the temptations. In doing so, he showed us that there is a way to overcome our own temptations to power, prestige, and possessions.

From then on, Jesus declared that a new kingdom was to be established – The Kingdom of God. He preached about this Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. He showed us what this Kingdom looks like, as he gave sight to the blind, healed broken limbs and hearts, advocated for the poor, and forgave the sins of prostitutes and tax collectors; rich and poor alike, he forgave them all.

Jesus travelled from place to place always calling others to welcome the Kingdom of God into their own hearts. He then invited them to come and follow him and help him bring the Kingdom of God into their homes, villages and regions.

However, those individuals with government and religious power did not like what they saw in the person of Jesus. They were threatened by how this new group constantly talked about and demonstrated life in the Kingdom of God’s love. One day they decided to kill Jesus. They thought that his death would put an end to this new way of life that was more about God’s justice, love, and grace than the ruler’s rules and reprimands.

Those who killed Jesus failed to understand that God’s love, justice, grace, and forgiveness cannot be stopped even by death. Three days later the never-ending love of God resurrected Jesus to new life. Indeed, he was the long awaited Messiah. He was not a political or religious savior, but a savior from all the
sin, the selfish choices, and everything else that separates us from God and one another.

Even though Jesus showed the way, revealed the truth of what God cares most about, and provided the way to eternal life, people still chose to go their own way. So once again God called a group of people to incarnate God’s love in the world.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church was born. The church was now the incarnate Body of Christ in a thousand and more ways and in all the places on Earth. The church was given the responsibility to declare the good news that God’s love had come most fully in Jesus. The church was now inviting people into the Kingdom of God. The church was declaring that in Jesus the walls of race, economics, sex, and politics had been broken down completely.

The church embodied the presence of Jesus by meeting regularly in homes to pray and fast. They attended the synagogue regularly to stay connected to the story of their faith. But more than just meeting together in Christian fellowship, they showed the world around them that there was another way other than that of power, prestige, and possessions.

The people shared their possessions with one another. They had no political or religious power. Yet through the power of the Holy Spirit, blind eyes were opened again, broken hearts and limbs were healed, and widows, orphans, and men and women on the streets were cared for. By bearing fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control - they were the living and loving presence of Jesus day by day. Each new day more and more people were responding to the call to come and follow Jesus into the Kingdom of God right where they lived. They were instructed to go out and invite others to come and follow Jesus as well.

This invitation to follow Jesus has not been revoked. The primary mission of the church today is to continually sound the call to all who will listen to come and follow Jesus. It is in this call to come and follow and invite others to do the same where our stories intersect most fully with the stories found in the Bible. Although there are no more pages to be added to the Bible, we are the new pages of the biblical story.

The story that began with God’s love and grace being given to humankind in a garden ends the same way. God’s ultimate plan includes the restoration of this broken and fallen world back to the beautiful garden it once was. The crooked paths will be made straight. The lion and lamb will befriend one another and sleep side by side. Jesus will inaugurate this when he returns once again to bring the fullness of God’s Kingdom on Earth.

When that day comes and Jesus returns, tanks will be re-formed into tractors, guns will be smashed into the ground, and nuclear weapons will be dismantled, so that nations can live without borders and in perfect peace. Crying will cease; death and
mourning will be no more.

What we must know is this. This story only has value for us as we respond to the invitation to bring our own stories into these pages, and find that these words of love and truth are deeply and indelibly inscribed on the pages of our own lives.

This is why your story, with all its beauty and brokenness, matters. It matters to God. It matters to your family. It matters to your peers. It matters to the world. You are a Beloved Child of God who has been invited into an intimate love relationship with God in the same way Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Ruth, John, Mary, Martha, and all the others were invited. It is an invitation into the Kingdom of God, where your story continues to thicken, the story of how God comes to capture and recapture, heal and heal again our broken lives.

From beginning to end, it is a story of God’s love intersecting the lives of people like you and me. You are invited to share your story...the world is waiting!

**Instructions for Re-Marking Milestones in Your Life**

1. On the timeline on the next page, mark the milestones that have happened in your life.

2. Consider how this milestone affected your life for better or worse (given how you saw or felt about the experience at the time.)

3. Did you have any sense of God being with you or of simply being cared for in some way during these milestones?

4. What similarities do you see in your story and God’s love story?

5. Consider how your story is a continuation of God’s love story.


7. Pray about sharing your story with others as opportunity opens to you or as you feel nudged to do so. Your story is important because others need to hear your God story to begin to grasp this life with God.

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**Example**

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From a fitful or restful sleep
I arise each morning
Beginning yet another
Day with God
Gratitude
Prayers for Others
Prayerful Scripture Reading
Listening Prayer
Gratitude

The spiritual exercise of offering gratitude to God is as old as the ancient stories found in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). The first record is found in I Chronicles which was written around 450 B.C.E.

*Give thanks to the Lord and proclaim his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his praises. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds. Exult in his holy name; rejoice, you who worship the Lord. Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him. Remember the wonders he has performed, his miracles, and the rulings he has given, you children of his servant Israel, you descendants of Jacob, his chosen ones.*

I Chronicles 16:8-13

The spiritual exercise of offering gratitude to God is your personal way of saying thank you to God for the gift of life itself. By finding something specific every day to thank God for this will begin to change your whole perspective on life.

*It is right and a good and joyful thing, Always and everywhere to give thanks to You. Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth*
The Exercise of Gratitude

Practicing the exercise of gratitude is quite simple.

Whatever it is that you are thankful for, use the pages provided here to express in your most creative way how deep your gratitude runs.

Being thankful for all the good things – big or small - can help you see other things with new eyes.

The more you practice this exercise, the more aware you will become of God’s everyday gracious presence.

Don’t rush through this exercise. It may require you to be quiet for a few moments before you realize for what it is that you are thankful.

If something happens for which you are thankful during your day, it would be a good practice to write it down right after you experience it. By doing so you will be better prepared to express your gratitude.
Prayers for Others

Prayer is one of life’s greatest mysteries. Sometimes you may see immediate results from your prayers and then other times you will fail to see any results at all. However, trying to figure out why some prayers appear to be answered immediately and others seem never to be answered is probably a futile exercise.

All you can know for sure is that whether you see results or not, we are still told to pray because on many levels, both seen and unseen, prayer does work.

In his book, Prayer, Richard Foster says, “In the ongoing work of the kingdom of God, nothing is more important than intercessory prayer. People today desperately need the help that we can give them. Marriages are being shattered. Children are being destroyed. Individuals are living lives of quiet desperation, without purpose or future. And we can make a difference ...if we will learn to pray on their behalf.”

This does not mean we have to carry the complete burden of those for whom we are praying. Instead it means that we join with them in their struggles by giving them our greatest support by remembering to pray for them.

Such prayer is as much for you the person praying, as it is for the person for whom you pray. In prayers for others, God moves in our hearts revealing what, if anything, we need to do to be more physically present to those in need.

Many times prayer is more action than it is words.
The Exercise of Praying For Others

This section is to help you organize your prayers for others so that it will be easier for you to remember those for whom you are praying in your everyday prayer time.

The instructions are simple. Organize your prayers into categories of family, friends, and others. Don’t forget that we are told by Jesus to also pray for our enemies.

Put a date beside the name of the person when you first begin praying for him or her.

Each day read through the list of names simply asking God to help those for whom you are praying to sense God’s peaceful and healing presence being with them in their struggle.

If there are times when it is clear that an answer to your prayer is felt, then it would be good to date that so that you can see how God responds to your prayers.

There will be some people for whom you want to pray for everyday in more general ways than mentioning a specific concern. You can do this by simply mentioning the person’s name.

As time goes along your list will grow with names of people for whom you will be praying.

“Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with.”

James 5:16, The Message
Prayerful Scripture Reading

The practice of Prayerful Scripture Reading goes beyond reading the Bible as just another source of information or as a constitution that describes what is right and wrong, or who is in and who is out. Actually Jesus taught against such ways of thinking.

As early as 200 A.D. Christians practiced the spiritual exercise of Prayerful Scripture Reading. Since then it has been practiced by a wide range of Christians over the centuries, including the Benedictine monks, Martin Luther, and John Wesley.

By practicing Prayerful Scripture Reading, you are sharing in the long line of Jesus’ followers who have been more intent on living out the spiritual truths found in scripture than trying to follow the letter of a legal document.

The goal of this exercise is to help you begin reading the scriptures in a way that is not looking for historical facts or even trying to understand the contextual setting. There is a place for that kind of reading and study of the Bible for sure.

Prayerful Scripture reading is just what it says – reading the biblical story as a form of prayer that opens up the reader to hear God speak through the scriptures.
The Exercise of Prayerful Scripture Reading (Lectio Divina)

Center
(If you have been following the other exercises up to this point then you should already be centered through your time of silence and listening.) If you are doing this exercise apart from the other exercises make sure you begin by taking a few moments of silence. Turn off all possible distractions (T.V. music, phones, etc.)

Read
You will find suggested scriptures passages in this section. Begin by reading the selected passage all the way through without pausing. If you choose to read your own passage just make sure that it is not too long - no more than 10 verses.

Listen
Read the passage again more slowly while deliberately listening for words or phrases that are speaking to you. Underline in your Bible or write the words down in your journal. Trust that through these words God desires to get your attention and speak to you.

Reflect
Reflect on what God may be saying to you through these words. As you reflect know that God’s love and grace are the essential measuring tools of all guidance that you receive in your time of reflection.

There is no condemnation for anything we have done or not done. Remember God’s word is not a legal document trying to point out your erring ways. Instead God’s word to you and to all people is always a word of grace even if it is a word of correction.

Pray
Pray asking God to show you how you might bring the meaning of what you heard from God into your everyday life beginning today.

Act
Use the pages of this section to record whatever it was that you felt God saying to you. Then write out how you see yourself responding with obedience to what God has spoken to you.

“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet, and a light for my path.”
Psalm 119:105
Selected Passages Suited for Prayerful Reading

**Old Testament**

Genesis 45:1-15  
Genesis 50:18-21  
Exodus 3:7-8  
Exodus 13:20-22  
Exodus 23:1-9  
Numbers 23:19-20  
Deuteronomy 4:29-31  
Deuteronomy 6:4-13  
Deuteronomy 7:7-9  
Deuteronomy 8:11-20  
Deuteronomy 10:14-21  
Deuteronomy 24:12-22  
Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Deuteronomy 32:3-12  
Joshua 1:9  
2 Kings 5:1-16  
Nehemiah 9:15-31  
Psalm 4  
Psalm 8  
Psalm 16  
Psalm 23  
Psalm 24:1-6  
Psalm 25:1-10  
Psalm 27:1-6  
Psalm 27:7-14  
Psalm 32  
Psalm 34  
Psalm 37:3-7  
Psalm 37:8-17  
Psalm 40  
Psalm 41:1-3  
Psalm 42  
Psalm 43:3-5  
Psalm 50:8-15  
Psalm 51  
Psalm 52:8-9  
Psalm 56  
Psalm 62:5-8  
Psalm 63:1-8  
Psalm 65  
Psalm 73:23-28  

Psalm 82:1-4  
Psalm 84  
Psalm 85:8-9  
Psalm 86  
Psalm 91  
Psalm 95:1-7  
Psalm 100  
Psalm 103:13-22  
Psalm 104  
Psalm 105:1-5  
Psalm 111  
Psalm 116  
Psalm 125  
Psalm 127:1-2  
Psalm 130  
Psalm 131  
Psalm 132  
Psalm 139:1-12  
Psalm 139:13-18  
Psalm 142  
Psalm 143:5-10  
Psalm 145  
Psalm 146  
Isaiah 6:1-9  
Isaiah 9:5-6  
Isaiah 25:4-9  
Isaiah 26:1-9  
Isaiah 30:18-26  
Isaiah 40:3-5  
Isaiah 40:9-11  
Isaiah 40:28-30  
Isaiah 41:8-13  
Isaiah 42:1-4  
Isaiah 42:6-9  
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Isaiah 58:1-12  
Isaiah 61:1-8  
Isaiah 65:1-2  
Isaiah 65:16-18  
Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Jeremiah 2:1-13  
Jeremiah 7:1-11  
Jeremiah 7:22-28  
Jeremiah 8:4-7  
Jeremiah 20:7-13  
Jeremiah 22:13-16  
Jeremiah 23:23-24  
Jeremiah 24:6-8  
Jeremiah 29:11-14  
Lamentations 3:22-27  
Ezekiel 34:11-16  
Ezekiel 36:24-28  
Ezekiel 37:1-14  
Daniel 3:39-42  
Hosea 2:16-17  
Hosea 2:21-22  
Hosea 11:1-4  
Hosea 14:2-10  
Joel 2:12-14  
Amos 5:21-24  
Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Zechariah 2:14-17

**New Testament**

Matthew 5:9  
Matthew 5:13-16  
Matthew 5:23-26  
Matthew 5:43-48  
Matthew 6:5-8  
Matthew 6:9-15
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Selected Passages Suited for Prayerful Reading

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## Selected Passages Suited for Prayerful Reading

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Jesus established a pattern for listening prayer by his example of choosing to make time for solitude and silence in order to listen for God’s ongoing direction for his life. He also invited the disciples to practice this exercise with him.

From that pattern came the tradition of listening prayer, also referred to as silence and solitude.

The earliest forms of listening prayer are attributed to ascetic monks living in the desert in the first few centuries after Christ’s death and resurrection. Commonly referred to as the “desert fathers,” the monks lived very simply in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria.

The exercise was reinvigorated during the 5th - 15th Centuries, through St. Bernard of Clarivaux, St. Hildegard, Meister Eckhart, and others. It continued in the post-Reformation church (Protestant Reformation led by Luther in 1500’s) with St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Therese of Lisieux, and St. Francis de Sales.

The purpose of time spent in listening prayer is to be with God just as you are and to allow God to be in control of the time. This is what makes listening prayer so hard and at the same time rewarding.

Even though it may not feel peaceful in the moment, this spiritual exercise promises to bring a new and powerful awareness of God’s peace and guidance as you learn to let go of control, get out of your head, and begin listening with your whole self for God.
The Exercise of Listening Prayer

Begin with a modest goal, especially if silence is a new practice for you. In the beginning, five minutes of actual silence will seem like an eternity yet it is a realistic place to begin. You can always increase the time as you progress.

It is helpful to set a timer (one that is not too loud) to help you settle into whatever length of time you have chosen. This way you can trust the timer to let you know when your time is up and you won’t have to be distracted by wondering how much more time you have left. Actually, the amount of time you spend is not nearly as important as the regularity of the practice.

Sit in a comfortable position with back and shoulders straight but relaxed. Place both feet flat on the floor and place your hands in a comfortable position in your lap.

Choose a simple word or short phrase that expresses your openness and desire for God in the simplest of terms. It is helpful if this word or phrase can be prayed very naturally in the rhythm of your breathing. (Example: Breathe in and say, “Lord Jesus,” and then breathe out while saying, “let your love shine in me.”)

Since there are all kinds of voices and messages rattling around in your head battling for your attention, do not be hard on yourself when your mind becomes so full of distractions that you feel like you are unable to continue the exercise. When the distractions come, gently return to your word or phrase allowing it to bring you back to center.

Use the blank pages that follow to date and record what, if anything, you hear. Some days you will hear something and some days you will hear nothing. However, it is important to record what you do hear, even if it is, “today silence was very hard and seemingly ineffective for me.”

Remember showing up to practice this exercise regularly is more important than how the time goes. By simply showing up with a desire to listen to God in the silence you will be surprised by what you hear. You may not hear anything in the moments of silence but the silence is still preparing you to hear something later.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10
Each evening I return
Reflecting on
  My joys
  My sorrows
  My grief
  My victories
  My aloneness
  My completeness
Therein I close my day
Knowing I have been
  With God
  And God
Has been with me
Prayer of Examen
Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen originated with St. Ignatius of Loyola. After being injured in battle he had time in his hospital bed to read about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints, and through those readings he gave his life to becoming a disciple of Jesus.

After Ignatius became a follower of Jesus, he developed spiritual exercises to rid the soul of all excessive attachments and to develop ways to help a person find God’s will and how to live into it.

One of the important exercises he developed was The Prayer of Examen.

There are two parts to it:

- Examination of **consciousness** to discover how God has been present throughout your day.

- Examination of **conscience** to discover those areas in your life that need further growth and healing.
The Exercise of Prayerful Examen

Consciousness

Review your day
When or where in the past 24 hours did I feel I was cooperating most fully with God’s presence in my life? When was I resistant?

Ask yourself
What habits or life patterns did I notice about myself today?
When did I feel most alive today? Most drained?
When did I feel alone today?
When did I give love today? Where did I receive love today?
When did I feel most fully myself today? Least myself?

Reconcile and Resolve
What concerns do you have about your day?
Ask for God’s direction.
Resolve to move forward into a new day tomorrow.

Conscience

Where do I need to grow?
Where am I holding judgment/grudges/resentment toward another person?
Where am I struggling with temptation?
How am I resisting God’s direction and intention for my life?

Use the pages in this section to record your responses to the questions. Some days you will respond to more questions than others. The point isn’t to go through all the questions religiously every day; it is instead to address the ones that speak most clearly to you on any particular day. What you will find is that over time certain ones will begin to come to you more naturally.

As you practice this spiritual exercise it is extremely important to remember that in the context of the love of God there is never any condemnation for our weaknesses or failures.

It may be helpful if you date your writing.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”
There come times in my life
When I need more
Understanding
Direction
Patience
Silence
Reconciliation
Resting
Peace
Life in Community
Service and Vocation
Listening for God in Others
Simplicity and Money
Conflict and Reconciliation
Resting and Sabbath
Fasting/Abstaining
Breath Prayer
Dreams and Call
Spirit - Guided Decision Making
Our everyday life with God is intensely personal. None of us can outsource our spiritual formation to anyone else; our journey is something that each of us must own. That said, God never intended our life with Him to be private. God created us to live and grow in community, and we grow the most when we share our stories, our journey and our lives with others.

The movement that would one day lead to the formation of The United Methodist Church was started and flourished as a network of small groups of people who shared a mutual desire to grow each day in their love for God and love for people. These men and women, under the guidance of John Wesley, would meet together regularly to pray for, encourage, and lovingly hold one another accountable as they grew as Christ’s disciples. Listed below are some of the questions that these groups used to guide their reflection and discussion. These may be helpful to use with your Circle or with others with whom you have a covenantal relationship for mutual encouragement and accountability.

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
3. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?
4. Did the Bible live in me today?
5. Am I enjoying prayer?
6. When did I last speak to someone about my faith?
7. Do I pray about the money I spend?
8. Do I disobey God in anything?
9. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
10. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
11. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I going to do about it?
12. Do I grumble and complain constantly?
13. Is Christ real to me?
14. What opportunities did God give me to serve others since our last meeting? How did I respond? How was I able to work for justice and peace?
15. What known sins have I committed since our last meeting?
16. What temptations have I met with? How was I delivered?
17. Have I nothing I desire to keep secret?
Life in Community (con’t.)

As you share your responses to any of these questions, it is also helpful to consider and share:

- What can you affirm about others in your Circle or group?
- What evidence of call do you hear in others in your Circle or group?
- How can you best pray for and provide accountability for one another in the coming week?
Service and Vocation

Presenting our gifts and talents for some form of remuneration is part of our gift to give back to others as human beings. Our work environment is the place where we spend most of our waking hours and energy. God delights in all that we do as all of life is sacred. Approaching our work as a spiritual exercise gives us the opportunity to reorient the tasks we enjoy and those we find unpleasant as an offering of love to God. The danger of being over-extended in our work place is inevitable as salary levels and professional requirements are ever increasing in a scaled back economy. The reflections below are designed to help you examine your presence, service, and fruitfulness in your workplace.

1. The work we are given to do is to make the world a better place in which to live. How is the work I am given to do making the world better?

2. Reflect on the quote, “Our work is love made visible,” by Kahil Gibran. How is love made visible through your work in the world? What needs to change so that your work is more fulfilling? Are you overextended at work? Explain:

3. Take time to pray for your co-workers and be thankful for the gifts that each one brings to the workplace.

4. How can I offer my gifts and presence in meetings and on teams…more mindfully? Jesus reminds us that we have all been given talents and that we have the potential to give ourselves wholeheartedly to whatever it is we must do.

5. How can I approach my work so that it is anticipated and fruitful action? How can I offer myself to God by intentional presence in the most trivial of tasks?
Listening for God in Others

One of the central ways that we express love to God is how we love one another. Learning to listen and share the stories of our daily lives are spiritual exercises that we all can learn to engage in new ways. Preparing to share our stories with one another does require some intention and openness to what God is going to reveal to you and to your community (family, friends, workplace, and neighbors).

Sharing our Stories

1. Be aware that your story counts just as it is. It is not to be measured or judged against anyone else. As you are sharing, remember that God delights in our stories and sharing them with one another.

2. Be open to what emerges in your heart and mind as you share your story. Unexpected emotions and thoughts may be experienced as you share your story with others.

3. Learning together by sharing our stories is a central way that God speaks to us and changes us. We can expect to learn as we share and receive our stories.

Receiving other’s Stories

1. Prepare to receive the stories that you hear with a desire to focus, and to be attentive to the person and to what God might be saying to you. If your mind wanders while someone is sharing, simply refocus your attention to the one speaking.

2. It is normal to sometimes experience judgment or impatience with the person speaking. Be aware of those thoughts and let them go. They do not define your listening or your desire to hear God in the person sharing. These are normal thoughts and distractions.

3. Receive the story with a grateful heart, and honor the one that you have heard by simply receiving and affirming the story. Listen for what God’s Spirit might want to teach you through this person’s story. The impulse to counsel, guide, and direct the one sharing the story is not appropriate in a shared group learning experience.

4. If the person sharing desires input or counsel, then you are free to offer that to the community in which it is being shared. It is not to be expected of one another. It must be invited and desired by the one who is sharing. The counsel and guidance of the community can be measured by how it reveals God’s love, mercy, grace, compassion, and justice. Sometimes the counsel should be intentionally sought through the spiritual exercise of Group Discernment.
Over and over again in God’s Love Story we find that we are invited to transformation through encounters with our suffering neighbors. Jesus said we would meet him in the stories and faces of the naked, the hungry, the imprisoned, the outcast, the sick, and the suffering. Jesus consistently revealed God’s mercy, compassion, and justice as he touched the untouchable, the outcast, and the unlovable.

When Jesus invited his followers to come and see, he radically revealed a new kind of kingdom. Jesus’ central story was always experienced and known as he touched the leper, the crippled, the blind, the outcast, the broken, and the lost.

Jesus’ invitation to experience God’s grace and love always included an invitation to personally love God, ourselves, and our neighbor through unlikely companions.

Jesus called us to this life of loving mercy, compassion and just action when he said that just as the Father had sent him, he was also sending his followers into the world.

**Reflections on those who are different from you:**
1. How did my family view and discuss poverty?
2. How did my family view and discuss homeless people?
3. How did my family view and discuss racial, educational, and economic differences?
4. How did my family’s viewpoint on these things impact your story?

**Encountering those who are different from you:**
1. What encounters with people who are different from me did I have today?
2. What encounter made the deepest impression on me?
3. What are my thoughts and feelings about this encounter?
4. What do I sense Jesus might be saying to me in my experiences?
Simplicity and Money

Jesus invites us to a joy filled and abundant life that is guided by what we treasure in our hearts. He said that “where we find our treasure we will also find our hearts.” It is good to take time and review the following questions that we can ask ourselves from time to time. Americans get bombarded with at least 1,500 ads a day telling us what we need to buy, what we need to relax, and what we need to make us smarter and more lovely.

The following questions are not to be used legalistically but as a guideline of love to simplify your life while taking control of the money you have been given.

1. Do I really need this?
2. Will it bring me joy (and not merely temporary happiness)?
3. How much of the money I would spend on this item can I free up to invest in others?
4. How much money do I need in savings and why?
5. How much money should I give away and why?
6. How many of my possessions are weighing me down with care and upkeep?
7. How can I simplify my life to be more present to God, friends, family, and those in need?
Conflict and Reconciliation

Conflict and struggle in human relationships are an ongoing reality. It is at the heart of the Biblical story. Jesus clearly taught and revealed God’s desire for forgiveness and reconciliation through the ongoing conflicts of his inner relationships with the disciples and friends and with the religious authorities. The way of Jesus is clear. It leads us to acknowledge our hurt and how we hurt others, and to engage in reconciliation between offended and offender. Conflict is not something to be ashamed about. It is a place where we are informed about ourselves and formed by God.

Some conflicts are slight offenses to our ego, or false self, which we can let go of and realize do not hold the potential to harm the ongoing integrity of the relationship. Other conflicts are more serious and call us to deeper soul searching, prayer, and reconciliation.

1. Acknowledge the conflict and why it was hurtful or offensive to you. Take a few moments to write it out and reflect on what is happening before God. Does this conflict reveal your deepest wounds? Does this conflict reveal your false self/ego? Does this conflict reveal an injustice that needs to be addressed?

2. Pray for the person that has hurt/offended you. Ask for God’s healing grace to bring awareness and recognition to you and to the offender.

3. Contact the person that hurt/offended you and ask for time to share your story with them.

4. Take responsibility for your desire to deepen the relationship by authentically sharing your story. Thoughtfully and prayerfully share your story and your desire to be reconciled in the way of Jesus. Acknowledge what you have learned about yourself and celebrate the love and grace of God that leads you to growth and a chance to grow deeper through conflict and reconciliation.
Resting and Sabbath

This ancient spiritual exercise reminds us that we are to rest in God’s provision and grace at least once every seven days. This time reorients our lives and reminds us of God’s unconditional love upon which we build our lives and relationships.

This ancient practice is part of the “Truth of the Genesis Story” which tells us that God rested Genesis 2:1-3. The Ten Commandments also instruct us that “six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God.” Deuteronomy 5:12-14. Jesus goes on to redefine how important the Sabbath is as a gift to humankind in Mark 2:23-28. He says, “the Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath.”

Make time in your schedule to plan a time of absolute rest during the day and evening time. This will mean saying “no” to the following:

- Undone “To Do” lists
- Activities outside of your home
- Chores

Resting is important for your body, mind, spirit, and soul. Make a place of rest in your home where you give yourself permission to rest your body in God’s love, provision, and grace. Whether you sit, recline, or lay down remember to intentionally relax each part of your body and reflect on all the things for which you are thankful. Try to nap if possible.

Mental rest is also important to recharge your creativity. As an example, the act of slowly preparing a meal can be a great gift in thanking God for the food you are preparing and then eating.

Soul rest is the combination of all of the above as we give ourselves permission to remember that God is God, and that you have limitations that need to be honored. It is a wonderful combination of intention to worship, trust in God, and childlike presence in the moment. It is sometimes helpful to plan and prepare for your week at the end of your Sabbath rest.

Sabbath rest recharges your body, soul, mind, and spirit and prepares you to face the outward expression of the remainder of your week.
Fasting/Abstaining

Throughout the Bible we see fasting as a practice of abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. Some of the Biblical stories involving fasting include: Moses, King David, Elijah, and Jonah the prophets, Esther the queen, Paul the apostle, Anna the prophetess, and of course Jesus in the desert for forty days preceding his public ministry.

1. Fasting/Abstaining is never to be seen or experienced as an act of barter to “give up something” or to take something back. It is a free gift.

2. Fasting/Abstaining brings balance to our lives. How easy it is to be overcome by schedules and nonessentials. Fasting slows us down and helps us remember that the things we crave....we usually do not need.

3. Fasting/Abstaining joins us in love and compassion with those who are hungry both in our prayers and in our actions.

If at all possible, please spend the time in reflection, quiet or reading during the regular meal/s you are intentionally missing. Listen closely to what surfaces during this time or afterwards. Be sure to record any insight or gifts that come forward.

Fruit and Vegetable Juice Fast
We recommend that you drink fruit or vegetable juice if you are fasting from a meal during a workday or are very busy at home. Drink plenty of water in between your fruit or vegetable drink.

A 24-Hour Fast
Many have found that lunch from one day to lunch the next is a good time to try a 24 hour fast. You may choose to drink water alone or fruit/vegetable juice. A light meal of fresh fruit or vegetables is a good way to break this fast. Heavy food after a 24 hour fast can upset your stomach. This fast involves missing two meals and requires drinking plenty of water.
Breath Prayer

This spiritual exercise is a way to welcome God’s presence during the moments of your day by praying short verses of scripture with your breath. The intentional slowing of our breath by inhaling and exhaling is a proven way to slow down your pulse and help to oxygenate your mind and heart. This slowing will help us experience more peace when the pace of our daily lives begins to create anxiety and tension in us. It is an invitation to stop and receive guidance when you have a decision to make. It is an invitation to let go and invite the peace of Christ, as the living Word of God, to meet us during the many moments of our day.

Breath Prayer – My identity - Psalm 139
   I am God’s – slow inhale
   Beloved child – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Trust – Romans 8:39
   Nothing can separate me – slow inhale
   From the love of Jesus – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Anxiety – Matthew 11:28
   Come to me all who are burdened – slow inhale
   And I will give you rest – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Fear – Matthew 28:20
   Do not be afraid – slow inhale
   I am with you always – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Guidance – Proverbs 3:5, 6
   Trust in the Lord – slow inhale
   And he will direct your paths – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Confession – Psalm 51:10
   Create in me a clean heart – slow inhale
   Renew a right spirit within me – slow exhale

Breath Prayer – Rest – Psalm 46:10
   Be still and know – slow inhale
   That I am God – slow exhale
Dreams and Call

Jesus invites us to see our lives as interacting with God with potential to change the world through relationships of love and grace. He told the disciples...formally fishermen...that they would be “fishers of men.” As we grow through our journey inward, together, and outward with our unique unfolding story we open our hearts to God’s unfolding call in all areas of our lives.

The following is an exercise that is helpful to review once or twice a year.

What is arising within you that is awakening your heart and mind?

1. Causes I care about - things that get my creative juices flowing:

2. Situations in the community or world that upset me or make my blood boil:

3. Things that make me sad, cry, or feel indignant:

4. Issues I always talk about with my friends:

What are your emerging strengths?

1. Things I am good at:

2. Things that give me energy:

3. Talents that I would be excited to use more:

4. My unique background or experience:

What place of pain in your story is intersecting with some place of pain in the world?
Spirit - Guided Decision Making

Sometimes we need help in knowing what to do when significant decisions must be faced and acted upon. This exercise will help you do that.

Acknowledge and celebrate God’s loving intention for you and the immediacy of God’s presence to guide and direct your unfolding life story.

Ask a group of trusted friends to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your decision making process.

Personally invite the Holy Spirit to create a spacious place of patience and grace as you move through the steps of decision making. It is important to remember that knowing God’s leading moves beyond analytical thinking and requires attentiveness to the wholeness of your body, soul, mind and spirit awareness.

1. Briefly describe in writing the decision and choices that you are facing.
2. Record the possible negative and positive benefits of both choices in side by side columns.
3. Circle the three positive benefits that stand out to you in each column.
4. Record those words for meditative reflection and prayer.
5. In your prayerful scripture reading is there any part of the Word that is coming as guidance related to this decision? Record those reflections here.
6. Consider living with each option in meditative reflection as if the decision has been made. What brings a sense of lightness and peace even if there are challenges involved? Where is there a lurking sense of anxiety or uneasiness? Record these reflections here.

After you have completed these steps ask your trusted friends to listen with you as you share your reflections with them.

After prayerful silence invite community reflection to your responses.

Take a few more days to prayerfully listen before you actually implement your decision and celebrate the wholeness and spaciousness of this process that allows for God’s kingdom to come and God’s will be done in your specific life on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.
Acknowledgements

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms.*


Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline.*


Guiness, Os. *The Call.*

Hall, T. *Too Deep For Words, Rediscovering Lectio Divina.*

Wiederkehr, Macrina. *Seven Sacred Pauses.*