

Seven Practices, Seven Days, Seven Weeks Week of March 13, 2016



During the season of Lent the “Daily Guide” will look and feel different than usual. Instead of a scripture verse and a reflection for every day we have put together seven practices, one for each of the seven days in a week and for seven weeks. Here is why we are doing this.

When we commit ourselves to practices that take us inward, there is a connection to God’s Presence in body, soul, mind and spirit that leads us to our everyday journey outward that also impacts our journey together as seen in our relationships with

family, friends, co-workers and the strangers we see and meet in our everyday lives.

The journey outward is our daily life where loving God in heart (spirit), soul (relationship with self/others), mind (intellect/work/vocation) and strength (body/eating, resting, exercise) and our neighbors (family, friends, co-workers, strangers) as we love our self is the “flow” that integrates the way of Jesus as an everyday practice of life.

Like a homing beacon or a point of inner alignment this “Magnetic center” keeps us on course. You might think of this “Magnetic center” as another sort of GPS— a “God Positioning System.” It is here where we access the unconditional love of God constantly offering us assurance, compassion, guidance, wisdom and forgiveness in the moments of our day.

This “Magnetic center” keeps you firmly connected to your depths. The more regularly you connect to this center the more you will begin to feel its tug wherever you are, reminding you of that deepening life that constantly flows within you even as you move about the busyness of your daily life.

This “center” keeps the outer part of you aligned with that deeper inner part: your yearning for God and God’s for you. Gradually over time you learn how to use it to find your way among the competing claims and the noisy clamors as well as the continuous undertow of pretenses and the unchecked ego.

There is another way to describe this center as well, which may at first surprise you. It is your heart. The heart is first and foremost an organ of spiritual perception.

May these seven practices for seven days and seven weeks awaken your heart to the reality of God’s presence all around you and in you in every season of your life. May your GPS – God’s Positioning System - guide you to discovering the joy of God’s salvation in your everyday life.

Adapted from Cynthia Bourgeault’s book: Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, pp. 161-163

Sunday: Our first GPS Input is: Remembering Scripture by Heart

Young children often say “I know that by heart”. That phrase implies that one has memorized something so that it is always repeatable and accessible. It is both in one’s head and one’s heart. The gift of recalling short verses of scripture that can be accessed at any time and in any place helps to create an unshakable foundation of God’s unconditional love and presence within us.

Practice: This week’s scripture memory verse **Genesis 26:24** “*Don’t be afraid for I am with you.*”

Take in one or two deep breaths to quiet the mind and calm the body. This gives space for God's Spirit to awaken your heart as you memorize and access the words of this scripture verse during your week.

Speak out loud *"Don't be afraid"*
Repeat out loud 3 x *"Don't be afraid"*
Speak out loud *"for I am with you"*
Repeat out loud 3 x *"for I am with you"*

You can set a reminder on your phone to repeat this practice during the day until it is memorized by "heart".

Monday: A Second GPS Input is: Breath Prayer

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

Here is a breath prayer you can use this week. This prayer will also continue planting this week's scripture memory verse deeper into your heart, mind and soul.

Slowly Inhale: *"Don't be afraid"* Slowly Exhale: *"for I am with you"*

Repeat as often as you need during the days of your week. It will help your mind to settle in to this truth *"Don't be afraid for I am with you."*

Tuesday: A third GPS Input is: Prayerful Scripture Reflection

This exercise invites reading the scripture as a prayer of listening and reflection so you can hear God's presence and guidance through the Word. Take in one or two deep breaths.

Read the scripture: ***Genesis 26:23-25 "Isaac went on to Beersheba, where the Lord appeared to him that night and told him, "Don't be afraid! I am the God who was worshiped by your father Abraham, my servant. I will be with you and bless you, and because of Abraham I will give you many descendants. Isaac built an altar there and worshiped the Lord. Then he set up camp, and his servants started digging a well."***

Slowly re-read the scripture and observe what words or phrases stand out or may be tugging at your heart. Note them somehow.

What might God be saying to you in these words? Spend a moment or two resting in God's perfect love for you.

Wednesday: A fourth GPS Input is: Gratitude

This is a core practice that reframes how we see our everyday life. Gratitude believes there is enough for this moment. Gratitude leads you to believing that there will be enough for the next moments of the day. Someone said it like this: There is always enough for our need, but never enough for our greed.

Genesis 26:24 leads us to this place of gratitude. *"Don't be afraid for I am with you."*

Gratitude helps to rewire the brain from negative to positive thinking and living. It is a simple yet profound practice. Neuroscience is proving that the practice of gratitude actually changes our brains (neuroplasticity) and strengthens our immune systems.

In this moment simply think of all the things for which you are grateful. Focus on one of the things for which you are most grateful and hold it in your mind and allow it to impact your body...let this image bring a smile to your face...soak in the feelings of joy and contentment.

Go back over your list and offer a prayer of gratitude to God. Every time you are tempted to feel sorry for what you don't have, remember your list and hone in on your single most important gratitude. It will transform your mind and bring joy to your heart and soul.

Thursday: A fifth GPS Input is: Listening with my Life

This practice offers an opportunity to examine your life by noticing how God has been present to you each day and to also see and name areas that need more growth or healing.

It is important to remember that in the context of God's love and the unlimited welcome of Jesus, there is never any condemnation for your weaknesses.

The questions below will help you to move through the process of listening for God in your life in the unwavering hope of transformation. We are using the outcome of compassion, forgiveness, wisdom and service as markers of transformation as we live in relationship with God in the way of Jesus.

- How did I receive God's love and compassion today? Did I resist it in any way?
- How did I forgive others and myself today? Should I have asked someone to forgive me for a hurtful word or action today?
- How did I serve others and myself today? Did I see a need and fill it or did I walk away?
- How did I apply the wisdom of God's unconditional love and unlimited welcome and unwavering hope to my life today? Where did I stumble with this?
- How is this week's scripture verse helping to guide me? ***"Don't be afraid for I am with you."***

Friday: A Sixth GPS Input is: Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is simply sitting in silence with an intention to be mindfully awake to God's love and your love for God. This prayer is beyond thoughts, emotions or sensations. It is like being with a very close friend or lover, where words are not required.

Centering prayer brings your relationship with God to a deeper level than just another conversation. It is pure communion with God.

Because our minds are so attached to thinking, it is helpful to choose a sacred word or short set of words that you will come back to each time your mind wanders off. If it wanders off a thousand times, then a thousand times you bring it back to your chosen word or words.

It is important to sit comfortably yet also with a sense of dignity – feet on the floor, back straight but not erect, hands gently placed on your lap in a non-defensive posture to receive.

Choose an amount of time to be with this prayer. So that you are not distracted, you may want to set a timer.

With eyes closed begin by centering on your chosen word(s). Maybe this week you can center on the words: ***"Don't be afraid for I am with you."*** Remember every time your mind starts to gear up and race, come back to your centering word(s).

At the end of your time take in a deep breath while saying one more time your centering word(s). Release the breath with a smile on your face and offer a word of gratitude for the day.

Saturday: A Seventh GPS Input is Simplicity and Money

Jesus invites you to a joy-filled and abundant life that is guided by what you treasure in your heart. He said, *"Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

Every year at Easter we have the opportunity to give over and above our usual offerings to an offering that specifically helps people on the margins find hope for their everyday lives. Easter is the most beautiful time to do this for Easter is all about rising hope. So we are calling this Easter offering – *RiseUp* Hope.

Here is a practice of asking some thoughtful questions that can help you share your heart with a financial gift for those who are struggling on the margins of life.

The following questions are not to be used legalistically, but as a guideline of love to simplify your life. It is to help you take control of the money you have either been given or earned so that you can give as much of it as you have dreamed of giving away.

Questions to Ask Yourself:

- Do I really need this?
- Will it bring me joy (and not merely temporary happiness)?
- If I did not buy _____, how much would I save and be able to give to those being helped with this Easter offering?
- How much money do I need in savings and why?
- How much money should I give away and why?
- How many of my possessions are weighing me down with care and upkeep?
- How can I simplify my life to be more present to God, friends, family, and those in need?