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Welcome!

Contemplative practices are intentional actions or activities that we do to connect more directly with the awareness of the Holy in our lives. For far too long, these practices were thought to be the domain of nuns, monks, and other religious “professionals.” Thankfully, that has changed, and now it is not uncommon for people from all backgrounds to have some form of contemplative practice as a regular part of their lives.

This 28-day eRetreat brings together two areas of focus that are not often combined: contemplative practices and wellness. Many retreats have been offered on contemplative practices. The same is true about wellness. What makes this retreat unique is that it focuses on the interrelatedness of the two. Throughout this retreat, you will have an opportunity to learn and experience first-hand how contemplative practices can have a positive effect, not just on your spiritual wellness, but on all areas of your well-being.

The Living Compass Model for Well-Being is built on four quadrants: heart, soul, strength, and mind. Within these four quadrants eight areas of wellness are addressed: Spirituality, Rest & Play, Healthy Relationships, Handling Emotions, Stress Resilience, Care for the Body, Vocation, and Organization. This retreat will explore how contemplative practices can positively affect all eight of these areas of well-being.

The four quadrants of the Living Compass will provide the structure for this retreat, and each week will focus on a different quadrant. Please note that as each day’s reflection is posted on Facebook, it will also be posted and archived on our Living Compass website. The archive of reflections can be accessed at www.livingcompass.org/contemplative-practices.

This retreat can be made by yourself or with a group. We recommend that you have a journal in which to write your responses to the reflection prompts we offer each day. This could be a journal you already have and use, or it could even be one you create digitally as a word processing document. As important as the daily reflections are, even more significant will be the reflections and insights that emerge for you in response to the reading and the contemplative practice. Each day’s reflection is followed by two sections. First, an “Invitation to Practice” section that offers a particular contemplative form we invite you to practice that day. This is followed by a “Making It Personal” section with questions to help you apply the reflection to your own life and context, including what, if any, connections you’ve discovered between your practice and that day’s reflection. We hope you will spend a few minutes each day with these sections in order to discover what may be stirring in you. Some days it might be a sense of gratitude or wonder. Other days it might be a prayer or a nudge that something in your life is calling out for attention.
For each of the 28 days of this retreat, we hope that you will try a spiritual practice, whether it is one we suggest, one you are already doing, or one you have always wanted to try.

Whether you are new to contemplative practices or have been practicing them for some time, we believe that your life will be enriched by connecting contemplative practices with your well-being, and hope you do, too.

We are honored, as fellow travelers on the way, to offer this guided retreat to you, and our prayer is that this journey may bless us all.

*Shalom,*

*Scott, Jan, and Robbin*
About the Writers

Robbin Brent has been dreaming, convening, and facilitating contemplative gatherings since 2010. She has served as the executive director of the Center for Spiritual Resources in the Episcopal Diocese of Western NC, certified Enneagram teacher in the narrative tradition; convener of Circles of Trust discernment groups, and facilitator of numerous spiritual deepening programs and retreats. She serves Living Compass, a spirituality and wellness initiative, as director of publications and resource development; and is an associate in Shalem Institute’s programs: “Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats,” and “Nurturing the Call: Spiritual Guidance.” Robbin also curates contemplative Wisdom resources, and hosts and films Wisdom Schools with Cynthia Bourgeault. Her two sons and grandson are her greatest joys.

The Rev. Jan Kwiatkowski is an Episcopal priest, licensed marriage and family therapist practicing Telemental Health in Wisconsin, and works part time with the Living Compass team. Jan and Dennis have been married for 40 years. Between the families of their four adult sons, they are blessed with eight grandchildren who are the absolute joys of their lives. Dancing and performing in parades with the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies, knitting, and sipping almond milk lattes are also a source of life and joy for Jan.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Stoner—founder of the Living Compass Spirituality & Wellness Initiative—has served his community for more than 30 years as an Episcopal priest, retreat leader, spiritual director, and author. In addition to his coaching and psychotherapy work, he leads wellness retreats for organizations and leadership teams. Scott has been married to Holly Hughes Stoner for 40 years and together they are the co-creators of The Teen Compass and the Parent Wellness Compass. In his free time, Scott loves cycling, running, and soccer, and spending time with family.
Virtual Group Guidelines

• Be Kind, Supportive, and Courteous
   We're all in this together to create a welcoming environment. This is a place for participants to respectfully share their personal reactions. It is not a place for debate or a place to “correct” others.

• Listening with the Ear of Our Hearts
   We are offering the gift of deep listening, to our own hearts, to each other’s, and to God’s. Don’t try to fix a problem or give advice but listen and be present in a prayerful and supportive way for each person. Speak in the first person as much as possible and don’t make generalizations or rules for others.

• We are Co-Creating this Group Together
   Respond in a receptive and accepting way toward each other, leaving judgment and criticism at the door. If you find a post that you feel violates these guidelines, please let the moderators know, either by tagging the post for the moderators to review or by sending one of us a private message.

• Respect Everyone’s Privacy
   Being part of this group requires mutual trust. Authentic discussions make groups great, but may also be sensitive and private. Hold in reverence and confidence what you hear in the group. What’s shared in the group should stay in the group.

• The Role of the Moderators
   The role of the moderators is to prompt conversation and to share additional material to enrich the conversation. They have sole discretion to remove any comments and/or participants that are deemed to be inflammatory, offensive, or inappropriate.

• Please Self-Monitor “Over Sharing”
   While we encourage personal life application of the material, this is not a therapy or support group. Seek professional help for painful and unresolved issues that arise. This group is educational, not therapeutic.

• Commit to thoughtful dialogue with one another on this shared journey
   Dialogue means “the word between us,” which suggests mutuality. Dialogue may occur in speech or in silence. Each participant chooses their participation: “All may, some should, none must.”

• No Promotions or Spam
   Marketing, spam, and irrelevant links aren’t allowed. Participants are welcome to share links to prayers, articles, books, and resources that they personally find to be helpful that are relevant.
Suggestions for Creating a Retreat Space at Home

- **Create a designated space in the home** where you read the daily reflections and engage with the contemplative practice. It could be anywhere, but it is helpful if you can read, practice, and reflect in the same place. If you have small children and a hectic schedule, even setting aside a corner of the kitchen counter or dining table will help you to be present to your commitment to take time each day to engage with the day's offering. This is a place where you will pause for a few minutes each day to nurture your own spiritual and emotional well-being.

- It can be helpful to **practice at the same time each day**. If you can't, don't worry about it; just try your best.

- You may want to **light a candle, play some quiet, peaceful instrumental music, or have a few special items around you** that help keep you centered (a photograph, an icon, singing bowl, flowers, etc.)

- **Print each day's offering** so you won't be disturbed by notifications on your electronic device during this time. If you want to read from a screen, make sure to turn off notifications so you can relax and be present to this time.

- **Keep a journal nearby** where you can record any thoughts, feelings, or anything you want to do or not do, any changes you want to make, any habits you want to form or any you want to stop, just whatever arises that you'd like to remember. You can also use your journal to respond to the reflection questions in the "Making-It-Personal" section following each day's reflection and suggested contemplative practice. Some people may choose to journal digitally, creating a word processing document for use during this retreat.

- **Consider using a timer with a soft alarm** to signal that the time you've set aside has ended. This can be a helpful tool so that you can let go of your concern about other obligations during this time.
Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, and congregations as they seek to live the life God calls them to in all areas of life—heart, soul, strength, and mind. We use these as our four compass points to help guide and equip us in eight areas of wellness.

Compass Points & Areas of Wellness

**Soul**

*Spirituality.* The ability to develop and practice a strong personal value system, and to discover a meaningful purpose in life.

*Rest and Play.* The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

**Heart**

*Relationships.* The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.

*Handling Emotions.* The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.

**Strength**

*Resilience.* The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.

*Care for the Body.* The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being, as well as the ability to end unhealthy ones.

**Mind**

*Vocation.* The ability to align our life’s purpose with the gifts and talents given by God. This includes work, volunteer service, and any educational/enrichment activities.

*Organization.* The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.

Creating resources grounded in the integration of spirituality and wellness is what makes Living Compass different from other wellness programs. Living Compass believes we all have many compasses that compete to guide our lives, often outside of our awareness. When we choose to make our faith the compass that guides decisions in all areas of our lives, we are better able to experience wellness and wholeness. It is worth noting that “health,” “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holy” all come from the same root word “hal” or “haelen.”
Contemplative Practices:
Introduction and a Brief Overview

What is the essence of contemplative prayer? The way of pure faith. Nothing else. You do not have to feel it, but you do have to practice it.
—Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart

Introduction to Contemplative Practice and Well-Being

Our intention and invitation for this 28-Day Retreat is to connect Contemplative Practices with our well-being. While several of the practices described in the next section will be woven throughout the 28-Day retreat, we will also suggest additional ones as our online reflection and conversation evolves and deepens during our time together. Along the way, you also may want to share a contemplative practice that you have found especially meaningful. As Scott says, the wisdom is in the group.

Before we dive in, it is important for us to have a shared understanding of what we mean when we say “contemplative practices.” The following are some helpful definitions and guidelines that will serve to support and enrich our journey together for the next 28 days.

A Definition of Contemplative Practice [©Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation]

A simple definition of contemplation is “loving presence to what is.” In a Christian context, because we “live and move and have our being” in God (Acts 17:28), being present to things as they are involves encountering the Christ who “fills the whole creation” (Eph. 1:23). In other words, Christian contemplation means finding God in all things and all things in God. Brother Lawrence, the 17th century Carmelite friar, called it “the loving gaze that finds God everywhere.”

Because people use “contemplation” to describe especially profound qualities of prayer, we often associate it with silence and stillness—perhaps even withdrawal from the world. Classically, however, it means immediate open presence in the world, directly perceiving and lovingly responding to things as they really are. Thus contemplation is not necessarily quiet and still. It may just as well be very active and noisy.

In this sense, contemplation is an all-embracing quality of presence, including not only our own inner experience but also directly perceiving and responding to the situation and needs of the world around us. Rather than trying to balance contemplation and action, it is more accurate to see contemplation in action, undergirding and embracing everything. In this way, all our thoughts and actions can be joined together in prayerful openness and loving responsiveness.

—excerpted from Contemplative Spirituality: A Shalem Senior Staff Monograph. Used with permission.
At its essence, contemplation is simply resting in God. And our desire to trust the truth in this moment, just as it is, is a gift we bring to contemplative practice. Together we will explore how well-being in the eight areas supports our spiritual well-being, and how contemplative practices enhance our wellness and wholeness.

**The Importance of Practice**

It is the little things we do, day in and day out, not how much or how heroic our actions are if we only practice intermittently. Calling this the 2 mm rule—the smallest changes that can yield the biggest results, Tony Robbins says, “A very powerful belief would be, ‘Nothing’s working, I’m only 1 mm away. What little thing do I change that when I do, it changes everything?’”

When we understand that not only is everything connected: heart, soul, strength, and mind, it is a requirement for transformation that we use what we learn in our practice to slowly and steadily build a bridge between contemplative practice and well-being that offers us the possibility of living into the fullest expression of our lives that God created them to be.

Each area has a gift to share with all the other areas of well-being. The body can’t get there without the mind; the heart without the soul. They are all connected in a unified expression of the divine indwelling of the Holy One. Only through the balancing of all four quadrants that we are able to live the lives we were created to live. We will be inviting you to a daily practice time that includes silence, practice, reflection, journaling, and then sharing in the safe, supportive space our private Facebook group provides.

Where to begin? Start anywhere. Trust your intuition about where to begin. And as you commit to a daily practice of prayer, sacred movement, reading, and silence, you will be healing all other areas of your well-being.

*So there is no bad place to begin. Simply open your heart and ask, trusting that the gift will come. Do what you can where you are. And be alert for the next step. However it leads you, your heart will know the way home.*

—Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*
The intention with all of these practices is to spend time with God. While we’ve offered suggestions for engaging with several contemplative practices, it’s helpful to remember that there’s no “right” way. Just keep experimenting with different practices until you find the one that speaks to you at this time in your life, knowing that it may change over time. Try not to be discouraged with the process. Remember that it’s more important to simply keep showing up, trusting that God desires us as deeply as we desire God. Meister Eckhart said, “The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.”

**Awareness through the Body, Breath, and Movement**

Following are some examples. With any of these, if movement is challenging you can engage with them from a chair or bed by moving your arm, a hand, or any other way in which you feel comfortable moving.

- **Breath and body awareness.** Focusing on the breath is one of the most fundamental ways to connect with the presence of the Holy. Because it is so important, we’re all given 23,000 breaths a day as an opportunity to connect. One suggestion: count breaths while breathing slowing and deeply.

- **Body Prayer.** One possibility is to follow prayerful gestures (many body prayer videos online; links in resources) to “Be still and know that I am God.”

- **Body Scan.** Scan body for any areas of tension—then gently allow it to relax/release. Often start with feet and move over all body, ending with the head. You can tense and relax muscles as you go. Some practices suggest visualizing a wave gently flowing over your body, releasing any held tightness or tension.

- **Conscious work.** This is a way of “waking up” and staying present. You can engage with this practice while doing any daily activity. For example, use your non-dominant hand when doing simple chores like sweeping, painting, washing dishes, folding laundry, etc. The intention is to see if you can stay present to the feel of the brush or clothes or dishes, your feet on the ground, the moment you pick your foot off the ground as you walk, the moment when your brush or broom makes contact with a surface. Staying in the present moment is the only place we will encounter God and this practice is one sure way to “wake up.”

- **Labyrinth walking meditation.** An ancient practice, there are many ways to engage with this meditation prayer practice. Often people come with questions/concerns/challenges, others simply want to find quiet retreat time away from their busy lives. Before entering the labyrinth, you can offer a prayer asking God to respond to a need or desire or a question. There is only one way to walk to the
center, and the same path to leave. When you reach the center, you may want to spend time in silence, in prayer, or even leave a small token of your journey inward (an acorn, a flower, a leaf). The return can be a way of reentering the world with a deeper sense of God's presence and perhaps guidance for a way forward. When you reach the entrance again, you may choose to bow and offer a prayer of gratitude.

- **Walking meditation.** This suggestion, especially relevant, was inspired by Ann Dean. Once you have relaxed and centered and have focused on your breathing for a few minutes, slowly stand and begin to take deliberate, slow, mindful steps. And with each step, feel that each step is a new and now step for peace, for being in union with God. That each step is us walking with God’s promises and living in hope, even though we may never see them come true. Each step is walking with God with hope and with peace. Each step is a step of shared faith and shared hope. When you feel complete, stand quietly for a few moments to allow the blessing of your walk with peace and hope to settle deeply in your body, mind, and heart. You may choose to offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

**Centering Prayer**

A way to sit with God without using language. It is to consent to the Divine Presence within. Dwelling in God who dwells in us. The present moment is where we meet God and where we have an opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of God’s love.

**The Four Guidelines** (from Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach):

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. (You can pray for God to give you an image/word that is just what you need at this time.)

2. Sifting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.

3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

**Discernment/Clearness Committee**

This comes to us from the Quakers and offers a powerful way to listen deeply to God’s call for our lives while maintaining our “identity and integrity while drawing on the wisdom of other people.” A Circle of Trust®, based on the work of Parker Palmer, offers “a process of shared exploration where people can find safe space to nurture personal and professional integrity and the courage to act on it.” Many who have entered into this process have said that they often find answers they were seeking in the process of preparing for the gathering. For much more on this practice, visit the Center for Courage and Renewal: http://www.couragerenewal.org/
Examen

A way of paying attention, listening to the voice of God. The Daily Examen is an ancient and powerful way of reflecting on the day so that we can more clearly identify how and where God has shown up in our lives and where God may be guiding us. Following is a brief description of the practice.

At the end of the day, sit quietly for a few minutes, seeking God’s presence. Then:

- Remember times in the day when you felt most alive, and thank God for those moments.
- Remember instances when you felt the least grateful, and offer those with thanks to God.
- Notice times in the day when you experienced being aligned with God’s purpose for you, and give thanks for those times.
- Notice any moments when you felt far from living out God’s purpose for your life, and offer those to God.
- Ask God to help you live ever more closely to God’s plan and purpose for you tomorrow, and then turn everything over to God to hold while you rest.

For more resources, a good place to start is the Ignatian Spirituality’s website: http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen

Gratitude Practice

Powerful practice for opening the heart and for healing our entire being. One way to begin: each day, think about three things for which you are grateful and write them down in a journal. It might be helpful to consider one or more of the eight areas of wellness seen with the “eyes of the heart.” Read them each day during this retreat as a powerful reminder of the goodness and grace and wonder that surrounds you.

The Jesus Prayer/The Prayer of the Heart

This ancient prayer practice is a powerful practice for our transformation. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says that the Jesus Prayer, more than any other, helps us to be able to stand in God’s presence by focusing our mind and attention exclusively on God. The traditional prayer is: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” It can also be shortened to: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy,” or simply, “Jesus.” It is helpful to begin with this prayer, but you can also use any short prayer of praise or desire. There are a few steps to get you started.

Begin with a few moments of relaxing and taking slow, deep breaths. Then, repeat the prayer out loud until your prayer becomes a silent repetition. Over time, you may find the prayer resounding continuously in your heart. When you feel complete, you may want to offer a prayer of thanksgiving.
Journaling / Contemplative Writing

Our writing will deepen the ways in which we notice all the ways the Spirit moves within and among us. Some reflection question ideas for a way to access inner guidance: Who has inspired you on your journey (living or not)? Who has mirrored for you that you are God’s beloved? Who has loved you and believed in you? Who has inspired the best in you? You could also reflect on where you have sensed God’s presence in your daily life, as well as where you may have been resistant to God’s presence. We strongly encourage you to have a journal, physical or electronic, in which to record your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and anything else that arises during this retreat.

Lovingkindness Meditation

Following are brief Instructions for Lovingkindness Meditation

To practice lovingkindness meditation, sit in a comfortable and relaxed manner. Take two or three deep breaths with slow, long and complete exhalations. Let go of any concerns or preoccupations. For a few minutes, feel or imagine the breath moving through the center of your chest—in the area of your heart.

This meditation is best first practiced toward oneself, since we often have difficulty loving others without first loving ourselves. Sitting quietly, mentally repeat, slowly and steadily, the following or similar phrases: May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful and at ease.

While you say these phrases, allow yourself to sink into the intentions they express. Lovingkindness meditation consists primarily of connecting to the intention of wishing ourselves or others happiness. However, if feelings of warmth, friendliness, or love arise in the body or mind, connect to them, allowing them to grow as you repeat the phrases. As an aid to the meditation, you might hold an image of yourself in your mind’s eye. This helps reinforce the intentions expressed in the phrases.

After a period of directing lovingkindness toward yourself, bring to mind a friend or someone in your life who has deeply cared for you. Then slowly repeat phrases of lovingkindness toward them: May you be happy. May you be well. May you be safe. May you be peaceful and at ease.

As you say these phrases, again sink into their intention or heartfelt meaning. And, if any feelings of lovingkindness arise, connect the feelings with the phrases so that the feelings may become stronger as you repeat the words.

As you continue the meditation, you can bring to mind other friends, neighbors, acquaintances, strangers, animals, and finally people with whom you have difficulty. You can either use the same phrases, repeating them again and again, or make up phrases that better represent the loving-kindness you feel toward these beings.

Sometimes during lovingkindness meditation, seemingly opposite feelings such as anger, grief, or sadness may arise. Take these to be signs that your heart is softening, revealing what is held there. You can either shift to mindfulness practice or you can—with whatever patience, acceptance, and kindness you can muster for such
feelings—direct lovingkindness toward them. Above all, remember that there is no need to judge yourself for having these feelings.

—https://www.mettainstitute.org/ Excerpts gratefully reprinted from the book The Issue at Hand by Gil Fronsdal, guiding teacher of Insight Meditation Center.

**Noting/Noticing**

Simple noticing, paying attention to what has our attention. No judgement, no altering of reality as it is, no blaming. (Can do this with time, money, etc.). The power in this practice is that when we fully notice whatever is coming up, it diminishes the strength of whatever may be preventing us from being fully aware of the presence of God in every area of our lives.

**Receive & Release Prayer**

This prayer practice focuses on two words: receive and release. First, find a comfortable sitting position and begin to take deep, slow breaths. After you have relaxed and settled into the gentle rhythm of your breathing, begin to say the word “receive” silently in your mind each time you inhale, and the word “release” as you exhale. So, it’s “receive” as you inhale, and “release” as you exhale. These two words will also help to focus your mind whenever it begins to wander. As you repeat the word “receive,” imagine yourself receiving what God has to offer you and wants to give to you right now. As you repeat the word “release,” imagine yourself releasing to God what it is you need to let go of at this time. Start by doing this practice for three to five minutes (it can be helpful to set a quiet timer at the beginning). As you feel more comfortable doing this practice, you may choose to extend the time. It is a gift to know that you can do this simple practice wherever and whenever you choose.

If you have a particular prayer concern, you can use this practice to assist you in finding peace and guidance regarding your concern. Bring the concern to mind as you begin the “Receive, Release” practice. You may even find that you are given a different word or phrase that comes to mind to use in place of “receive” or “release.” You might, for example, find yourself mindfully repeating “patience,” “kindness,” or “forgiveness” on your in-breath and perhaps something like “control,” “anger,” or “judgment” on the out-breath.

**Resonance or Presence Practice**

“Where am I right now?” A contemplative practice for a deepening awareness of sensation, a requirement for being present. The Resonance Practice is also known as the Presence Practice. You can do this alone or with a partner. Remember to:

- Stay with curiosity and let go of expectations, predictions, and judgments.
- Titrate or loop the sensations-attend to the sensation in the moment
- and don’t get stuck on a particular one.
- Let go of any “story” or narrative and stay with the sensation itself.
A Brief Overview of Contemplative Practices

Working alone:

1. Find a quiet space. Sit in a chair with your feet on the ground.

2. Start by simply asking yourself “Where am I right now?” “What percentage of me is in the chair?” Notice where you are in relation to the room.

3. Notice where your body is making contact with another surface—the floor, the chair, your clothes. For example, “I feel my left foot more on the floor than the right. The right side of my back is making more contact than the left with the chair.”

4. Track the sensations as you notice them. If you get caught in emotion or story, come back to the sensation. “What sensation tells me I am feeling…?”

5. You may start noticing how your chest or belly moves when you breathe, the weight of your hand on your thigh, whether your eyes are open or closed.

6. As you continue, you may notice more and more internal sensations—more space in your chest, the tightness in your eyes, etc.

7. Stay with the sensations until you feel it is done. The goal is not necessarily to be completely still or spacious, even though that may happen, but to simply know where you are right now—how your internal space is, where you are in time and space, and the quality of the space around you.

—excerpted from “The Evolving Enneagram” by Ruth Hill, Source: Anna Chitty. For more information, visit https://bit.ly/2Ylm4Lq

Sacred Reading *(Lectio Divina)*

Listening with the ears of the heart. Choose a short reading (scripture, inspiring text). You don’t need to set a goal of a certain amount of text to “get through.” Let yourself be guided as you follow the four movements described below.

**LECTIO:** Read the text slowly, gently, out loud. Savor the reading, listening for the “still, small voice” of a particular word or phrase that says, “I am for you today.”

**MEDITATIO:** Take the word or phrase into yourself. Allow it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Let your imagination engage the text as an invitation to dialogue with God.

**ORATIO:** Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Experience this word or phrase as a means to bless and transform the thoughts and images that God’s Word has awakened in you. Offer this as a prayer.

**CONTEMPLATIO:** Rest in God's embrace. Let go of words and images. Rejoice that God is with you in silence, spiritual rest, and inner receptivity.
Sacred “Seeing” *(Visio Divina)*

**Icons.** Here are some simple instructions to get you started. The most important thing to remember is that the image is simply a portal to presence, not a work of art to behold. As you gaze on it, let it open your heart to a direct experience of divine loving Presence.

- Light a candle before the icon as a symbol of the living divine presence.
- Sit as close to the icon as you feel comfortable doing.
- Close your eyes and offer a prayer that expresses your desire to touch God’s presence through the icon, and to relinquish whatever may distance you from that intent. As best as you can, gently release any sense of judgment, hardness, distance, curiosity, or distrust as these may arise.
- Open your eyes and look at the eyes of the person portrayed in the icon. If the icon includes several people, choose the most prominent figure. If the icon does not have any eyes prominent, allow your gaze to find its own place of rest and focus.
- Spend a moment reaching for God through your will through the eyes. Resist the impulse to grasp for some kind of knowledge. Instead, keep your eyes very soft, gaze on the image and let yourself be known by God through the icon’s eyes.
- Continue to gaze at the icon in this open, willing-for-God way for some period of time is suggested that you try at least 10 minutes the first few times, and then lengthen the time to 20 or 30 minutes as you become more comfortable.
- When you sense the time for this prayer is over, close your eyes and let an image of the icon remain in your mind. Then let the image fade into a formless presence for God.
- Close your time of prayer with gratitude for whatever has been shown you through this way of praying.
- When you do not have physical access to an icon for prayer, see if you can recall the image of the icon in your imagination and “sit” before it, so to speak, in your mind’s eye.

—Adapted from *Living in the Presence* by Tilden Edwards

**Sacred images.** You may have a photograph, painting, or something from nature that holds meaning for you. You can follow the same instructions as Icons.

**Interior visualization.** In this practice, we work with an image through our imagination. To begin, we encourage you to search your mind and heart for an image that has inspired you; a place in nature: sunset/sunrise, woods, mountains, desert, seaside; or an image of light, anything that you feel drawn to sit with in silence. For example, recall a sunset in your mind and heart. Let it remind you of your steadfast love of God. Allow that to help you to gently let go of all that isn’t God. Stay with the image until you sense it is time to let it go. Continue to focus on your breathe, resting in and valuing the silence. Silence beckons us home to our truest, deepest self. Some possible reflection questions: What am I beholding? What is God beholding in me?
Note: Any image, interior or exterior, is simply a way to become more aware of the presence of God. It is not to appreciate the image for its aesthetics but to gaze softly until the image drops away as we become aware of the presence of the Beloved.

Using Scripture or other great passages for meditation
For example, read the Prayer of St. Francis slowly, over and over again. You can even memorize a passage for a deeper experience. Read and savor each word and phrase, for anywhere from 10-30 minutes. It is helpful to set a soft timer so your attention won't be divided.

Sound and Silence
_Chanting moves things out of the head and into the great river of the heart._
—Cynthia Bourgeault

Singing/Chanting. From Cynthia Bourgeault on Chanting:
Chanting is at the heart of all sacred traditions worldwide, and for very good reasons. What meditation accomplishes in silence, chanting accomplishes in sound: it wakes up the emotional center and sets it vibrating to the frequency of love and adoration while feeding the body with that mysterious higher “being food” of divine life. Sacred chanting is an extremely powerful way of awakening and purifying the heart because it allows us to experience, beyond the distortions of our own personal passions, the power and profundity of the divine passion itself.

At its simplest, chanting is simply a matter of putting voice to the words you see on a page. On a single tone is fine. Don't be embarrassed or self-conscious about how you sound; instead, simply sense the wonder of your own breath and your own tone. Out of these two elements, all agree, the divine Source brought the created realm into being, and these two elements are right there in you! In a mysterious way, your true voice, whether large or small, high or low, bold or timorous, is very closely related to your true self; and as you learn to sing out of your own natural being without pretense or strain, the beauty of your unique quality of aliveness will shine through.

—Cynthia Bourgeault, _The Wisdom Way of Knowing_

Tonglen Meditation
Tonglen is Tibetan for “giving and receiving,” and refers to a meditation practice found in Tibetan Buddhism. _Tong_ means “giving or sending,” and _len_ means “receiving or taking.” It can be a powerful tool for managing negativity

One of the most unique things about this specific form of meditation is that it can actually help take negative energy and transform it into something more positive. Tonglen is great for those who want to overcome negativity. This is why those who practice this form of meditation often use it specifically to handle stress, anxiety, health issues, pain and inflammation. However, there are even more benefits to this form of meditation for those who want to remove negativity from their lives and find more peace and positivity in the process. Many have found that it can help increase positive emotions, improve emotional
intelligence, help with low self-esteem, reduce the symptoms of depression, help relieve pain and suffering, and help people overcome their fears.

Simple instructions for practicing Tonglen with self, then with others, and then with the world, can be found in *The Direct Path* by Andrew Harvey, pages 150–155.

**Welcoming Prayer/Practice**

Cynthia Bourgeault recommends and affirms the Welcoming Practice as a vibrant energetic, embodied witnessing practice, and an essential tool for inner transformation. She describes the practice as “Centering Prayer’s powerful companion piece for turning daily life into a virtually limitless field for inner awakening.” When used fully and consistently it has the capacity to quickly and effectively dislodge us from our habitual reactions, emotional programming, and limiting comfort zones. Using it can help move us through challenging or painful experiences, times of disturbed emotion or anguish, and even moments where unhelpful control tendencies and self-inflation takes us over.

**The Welcome Practice has three steps:**

1. **Focus or “sink in”** to become aware and physically present to the particular experience or upset without analyzing or judging yourself or the situation. Don’t try to change anything at this stage—just stay present.

2. **Welcome and lightly name** the response that is being triggered by the difficult situation (such as “fear” or “anger” or “pain”). Acknowledge the response as sensation, and recognize that in this moment, if the experience is not being rejected or repressed, it can be endured. Ever so gently, begin to say “welcome” (such as “welcome fear”, etc…) Though this step is counter-intuitive and the impulse is most likely to try to push away the unpleasant emotion, Cynthia explains “…by welcoming it instead, you create an atmosphere of inner hospitality. By embracing the thing you once defended yourself against or ran from, you are actually disarming it, removing its power to hurt you or chase you back into your smaller self.”

3. **Transition to a “letting go,”** whereby the intensity of the situation can recede. This enables the natural fluidity of sensation to come and then go.

—For more on the Welcome Prayer/Practice, go to: https://bit.ly/2Sqtj0R