

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

As your group studies God's word and prays together, there may be times when spending time in God's presence as a group is an insightful and transformative experience. Below are the instructions for a variety of spiritual practices that you can try alone or with your group.

## MY THOUGHTS VS. GOD'S THOUGHTS

1. Set your timer on your phone for 1 minute.
2. Tell the group to let their thoughts run wild then say go.
3. After 1 minute ask the group what they thought about during that first minute.
4. Set the timer for 1 minute again.
5. Invite the group to find themselves in the presence of God for this next minute.
6. Ask the group: "how was the second minute different from the first?"

## PALMS UP/DOWN

1. Invite your group to sit comfortably with their hands out in front of them.
2. As their palms are down, instruct them to pray about things they want to let go of.
3. As their palms are up invite them to receive what God has for them.
4. Take 3-5 minutes to pray together this way, flipping hands up and down in a regular rhythm (~15-20 seconds until each person establishes their own rhythm).

## GUIDED IMAGERY

1. Invite your group to sit comfortably in their chairs and close their eyes.
2. Invite them to envision Christ on the throne.
3. Encourage each person to envision bringing their worries to Jesus and laying them before him, and reflect on what feelings come up, what they envisioned, etc.

## BREATH PRAYER

1. Have everyone take a deep breath in together for the count of 4.
2. Then have them hold their breath at the top for a moment (count of 1-2), and then breathe out for the count of 8.
3. Encourage them to practice a few deep breaths like this on their own.
4. As they are breathing, tell or remind them that deep breathing resets the nervous system.
5. On their next breath in, have them start a prayer in their mind by breathing in something they need from God or a name for God. (example: "Lord I need peace," or "The Lord is my shepherd.")
6. As they breathe out, have them pray in the second half of their prayer. (Example: "Thank you Lord for your peace," or "I have everything I need.")
7. Repeat for as long as you would like. (~3-5 minutes)

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## CENTERING PRAYER

1. Pick a word or an image that will help you focus on being present to God.
2. Sit comfortably in your chair.
3. Set your timer for 5 minutes and invite the group to try and find themselves in the presence of God.
4. Say to the group "If at any point you find yourself distracted, refocus on God's presence using your word or image."

## REFLECTIVE SPEAKING AND LISTENING

1. Pick a passage of Scripture to read - read verse by verse and follow the steps of reflective speaking and listening after each verse.
2. Reflective Speaking:
  - a. *Anchor in Christ* - Center yourself (mind, heart, soul) on Christ.
  - b. *What I see/hear* - Report the facts. "When I saw..." or "When I heard..."
  - c. *What I think* - "When I saw...it made me think..." or "When I heard...it made me think..."
  - d. *What I feel* - "When I saw...it made me think...and that makes me feel... (sad, angry, guilty, afraid, etc.)"
  - e. *What I want* - What I want for me, you, us is...
3. Listening:
  - a. *Anchor in Christ* - Center yourself (mind, heart, soul) on Christ.
  - b. *Focus* - Your thoughts on God, take a few deep breaths and focus.
  - c. *Summarize* - "What I'm hearing/seeing is..." or "God, you seem to be saying..." or "It sounds like..."
  - d. *Invite* - Invite God to say more. "God, can you say more?"
  - e. *Ask* - "God, may I ask you a question?"

## UPWARD, INWARD, OUTWARD

1. Pick a passage of Scripture to read - then follow the up, in, and out prompts and hand postures.
2. **Upward** – Hold your hands out open in front of you, facing up (the same way you would to receive a blessing). Pray upward in adoration to God. Reflect on His character and attributes. Thank God for who He is.
3. **Inward** – Place your hands over your heart. Look inward for self-reflection. Look into God's truth and what it reveals about who He is, and who He is calling us to become.
4. **Outward** – Hold your hands out facing out (the same way you would offer a blessing to someone). Pray out for those around you and for our world. Pray that His Kingdom would come to transform our hearts and the world around us.

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## Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Follow the sections below to engage with a passage of scripture as a group. Read each one aloud and then take time between to reflect.

### Silencio

Take a few minutes to prepare yourself to hear and receive the word of God. Ask God to clear any thoughts that might be troubling or distracting you, or to free you from any tiredness or fatigue you might feel, anxiety you are holding, or emotional leftovers that you bring with you from your week. Take a few deep breaths, intentionally releasing any stress. Be with God as he stills your mind and spirit.

### Lectio

Lectio is the process of sitting with a scripture, reading or hearing it out loud, and listening to what God is trying to bring to light as you sit with that particular passage. Grab a notebook, sit in a comfortable position, and listen to this passage of scripture. As you do, listen for words or phrases that stand out to you. When they do, allow yourself to hold the word or phrase in your mind. Don't focus on taking notes or writing anything down yet – just sit and allow the word of God to wash over you as he brings light to what you need to hear today.

**Have someone in the group read aloud, slowly, the passage of Scripture you choose** (Jeremiah 18:1-10, Psalms 8, 19, 34, 121, 138, or another passage).

After reading, sit and reflect/journal for a few minutes.

### Meditatio

As you prepare to read the same passage over again, put yourself in the place of the person writing/the character. Use your senses to guide you through this. Feel what the person may be physically feeling, envision what they may be seeing, smelling what they may be smelling, feeling whatever emotions their words portray they are feeling. As you read the passage again, hold the feelings that arise as you place yourself into the story.

**Have someone else in the group read aloud, slowly again, the same passage.**

Sit in the feelings that arose as you read the scripture. Take a few moments to offer those feelings back to God – you can pray, or journal, or simply sit in silent communion with God.

### Oratio

Take yourself back into the story of the passage. Allow whatever thoughts or feelings come as a response to go where they need to. Allow God to guide you where he desires. Don't decide ahead of time what your focus should be – simply allow the spirit to lead you where it may.

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**Have another person in the group read aloud, slowly, one last time, the same passage.**

## *Contemplatio*

Take a few moments now to commune with the Lord. Rest in his presence and reflect on whatever he has laid on your heart at this time. Continue to take slow, relaxing breaths, journal if you feel prompted to, or just sit with the Lord as he directs your thoughts.

Spend time debriefing with the group by sharing thoughts on the experience or insights they received during the practice.