Seven Spiritual Practices

Busy People

Seven Spiritual Practices for Busy People

It can be a real challenge to keep our priorities straight in this busy, conflicted world. Who of us doesn't struggle against the ruthless tyranny of the urgent! Mix in the media, consumerism and culture and it's difficult to keep the main thing as the main thing.

A busy, hard-pressed King David inspires many people to place the greatest priority right up there at the top of their list. David knew life's pressures as a great military leader, statesman, poet, musician, and genuine Renaissance man! David was far from perfect. He had sinned much and been greatly forgiven, but God chalked David up as a success in His Book. The Bible twice calls David "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

David sings in Psalm 27:4 about making the greatest priority the number one thing in his life:

"One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple."

The "one thing" David gave himself to was daily practicing God's presence. Whether in the palace, wilderness, or on the battleground, David was determined to live in constant God-awareness. He was resolute in being present to the God who is ever present to us. David discovered that by living in God's constant presence he would experience God's constant love, provision and protection:

"For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock" (Psalm 27:5).

I asked God to help me make the greatest priority the number one priority in my life. After having chased after many other things, I longed to make knowing God the main thing. I then sensed God bringing people to me who also longed to live in the wondrous daily awareness of God. They have taught me much about the joy that comes with life's greatest priority!

One day when I was a young child I had buttoned my shirt incorrectly, and went to my mother for help. How could I get my buttons right? My mother taught

me to always start with the top button, and then everything else lines up right.

What follows in this pamphlet are "top button" practices that help everything else in my life line up right. They help me live in daily awareness of God's presence and beauty. So I pass these practices on to you believing they will also open for you a new and exciting dimension of life. By making the greatest priority your top priority you will likely find other things lining up for you.

PRACTICE ONE: THE DAILY GOD HUNT

In God we live and move and have our being.

Acts 17:28

While God is always and everywhere present to us, we might not always be present to Him. This first spiritual practice can help us awaken to the God who is always with us, the amazing God in Whom we live and move and have our being.

This practice is one way in which many people, like David, seek to live each day in God's presence beholding His beauty. There are various forms of this ancient practice of beholding God, but I like the form called "The Daily God Hunt". I discovered this spiritual practice in David and Karen Mains' book, *Daring to Dream Again*. Some people hunt for gold, some hunt for buried treasure; with The Daily God Hunt we go hunting for God.

We start The Daily God Hunt first thing in the morning with a simple prayer telling God that we are going to be watching for Him throughout the day. Then with eyes opened wide to His presence, we look for Him as He might reveal Himself in any one or more of the following ways:

- An obvious answer to prayer
- God showing Himself in His creation (gorgeous sunrise, colorful flowers, exquisite design of a leaf, etc.)
- God being present to you in another person
- God helping you to do His work in the world
- An evidence of God's love and care for you
- · Add your God moments here...

At day's end, take a few moments to reflect back over your day to note any "God Sightings" you may have had. Then thank God for those God Sightings and His presence with you throughout your day. You can double the delight of your God Sightings by sharing them with another person. Your God Sightings can be an encouragement to them as well, and open their eyes to God's daily presence with them. People find that the more they look for God in the day, the more

aware they become of His constant presence with them.

Like David you can experience the encouragement and comfort of God's presence with you:

"Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at
the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast."
Psalm 139:7-10

PRACTICE TWO: PALMS DOWN, PALMS UP

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you.
Psalm 55:22, David

Not unlike David, we also face "giants" in our lives, taking on problems bigger than us. It was in Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, that I learned how to better place my problems in God's hands and experience His presence with me. Foster calls this spiritual practice, "Palms Down, Palms Up". The practice goes like this:

- 1. "Begin by placing your palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God. Inwardly you may pray, 'Lord, I give to you my anger toward John. I release my fear of my dentist appointment this morning. I surrender my anxiety over not having enough money to pay the bills this month. I release my frustration over trying to find a baby-sitter for tonight.' Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you... release it. You may even feel a certain sense of release in your hands."
- "After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Perhaps you will pray silently, 'Lord, I would like to receive your divine love for John, your peace about my dentist appointment, your patience, your joy."
- "Having centered down, spend the remaining moments in complete silence. Do not ask for anything. Allow the Lord to commune with you, to love you."

Try praying "Palms Down, Palms Up" for a few days and watch for the difference it can make in your life!

I cast all my cares upon You, I lay all of my burdens down at Your feet. And any time I don't know what to do, I will cast all my cares upon You.

- Kelly Willard

PRACTICE THREE: PRAYING SCRIPTURE

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63:5-8, David

There is a powerful way of meditating on and praying Scripture that goes back to David's time and beyond. The ancient Church called this way of praying Scripture, <u>Lectio Divina</u>, or "Sacred Reading". I call it "Praying Scripture". It's a spiritual practice that joins the power of God's Word with the power of prayer.

Praying Scripture is a four-step process: READ, REFLECT, RESPOND, REST.

- <u>READ</u>: Read a short Scripture text slowly and prayerfully, two or three times. As you read, listen for the Holy Spirit's voice speaking to you through the words you read. Pay close attention to a word or phrase that stands out to you.
- 2. <u>REFLECT</u>: Reflect on what you have just read, focusing on the word or phrase that captured your attention. Meditate on that word or phrase, picturing the images, letting them sink into you. Take time to let God's Word to speak to your life.
- 3. <u>RESPOND</u>: Respond to God's Word to you. Talk with Him about the thoughts, feelings, and questions stirring in you as you read and reflect on His Word. Make this into a real dialogue with God's Spirit within as you both talk with Him and listen for Him.
- 4. <u>REST</u>: Rest finally in God's presence for a few moments. Let yourself experience the "rest" that Jesus promises all who come to Him. This dimension of rest is often overlooked in times we spend with God. This

has been called "lap time" with God, as we just let ourselves be with God. No need here for any words, any effort, any trying to please. Only "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Complete praying Scripture by praying The Lord's Prayer, The Our Father, or your own prayer of praise to God.

For today, pray Scripture by taking Psalm 23 and using the four steps of READ, REFLECT, RESPOND, and REST. For tomorrow, you could stay with Psalm 23, or go on to another psalm or brief gospel passage.

PRACTICE FOUR: PRAYER WALKING

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.

1 Timothy 2:1

Jesus and His apostles did a lot of walking and they did a lot of praying. And if Jesus said that we "ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1), then they must have done a lot of praying as they walked. Many people find that they do some of their best praying as they walk. I know that I do, as I sometimes get sleepy when I pray or I lose focus. Prayer Walking helps me with that.

Donald Whitney, in his book *Simplify Your Life*, says this about Prayer Walking: "The walking and the weather invigorate my sluggish soul. Looking up into the blue or out to the horizon refreshes my sense of the greatness of God. The sights, smells, and sounds of my Father's world surround me with reminders of His presence. The cadence of my pace or stopping occasionally to stare into the distance, often enables me to concentrate in prayer more easily than when I'm still and my eyes are closed."

I like to walk, and I like to pray. Here are some things I've learned about Prayer Walking that I hope will be helpful to you:

- Begin your walk by asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to what He wants you to see and to hear as you walk.
- Greet anyone you meet along the way, breathing a blessing for them.
- Pray for neighbors as you pass their homes; the ones where you know there is sickness, unemployment, loneliness, discord, etc.
- Keep all your senses alert to any sight, sound, or scent you encounter in the Father's world. Talk with God about what you are experiencing.
- Make room for silence as you walk, allowing space for the Holy Spirit to speak to you and to think His thoughts through you.

- Pray for any school or church you might pass.
- As you walk remember the basics of prayer, ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

If you already walk for exercise or recreation, why not turn your walking into Prayer Walking this week? If you are not walking, how about going for a walk for the sole purpose of praying? And sometimes, take another with you and walk and pray together.

PRACTICE FIVE: UNPLUGGING

Be still, and know that I am God.
Psalm 46:10

"The world is too much with us; late and soon," lamented the poet William Wordsworth almost two centuries ago. What might Wordsworth say about how the world crowds in on us today! While Americans continue spending 26-28 hours a week in front of the television, our time on the Internet has increased 121% over the last five years. How many times I catch myself going online just to check my email and an hour later I have forgotten why I went online in the first place. Many of us are left feeling the need for time just to think, to talk, to feel, to listen, to pray, and to be.

From the earliest times the people of God have practiced fasting as a way of spiritual cleansing, renewal, and to symbolize their need for repentance and change of direction. Today many people are also feeling the need to 'fast' from the media for a while and pull off the great information highway. In order to better center their lives, they make time to pull the plug on the Internet, television, email, text messaging, and itch to always feel plugged in.

Our Lord Jesus forever remains the model for unplugging and for taking time away from the very world He came to save. Consider Jesus' example in the following scene from the Gospels:

"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

When they found him, they said to him,

'Everyone is searching for you.'"

Mark 1:35-37

Even with everyone searching for Jesus and trying to connect with Him, Jesus recognized His need to unplug. Consider the following ways in which you might want to occasionally unplug so that you might be fully present to God and fully present to others:

- Set aside one day a week, or at least a few hours, to be as media free as possible (i.e. unplugging from the Internet, television, Facebook, Twitter, etc.).
- Create a physical space where you put aside high-tech devices as a way of saying to one another, "I am present." Have a tray in which phone, computer, iPad and other devices are placed when walking in the door of your house. Those devices remain there for the night unless there is some "good reason" to access them.
- Listen to silence or to music as you drive in the car rather than the news or talk radio.
- Listen for God instead of turning on Pandora, the radio or TV when you get up in the morning.
- Go for a walk; read a poem; talk to your spouse. Even when "Everyone is searching for you", just let yourself be! God will keep the world spinning while you unplug.

Try some of these suggestions and then reflect on how they work for you. Talk as a family about your use of the media, and the media's use of you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help and guide you as you follow our Lord's example of unplugging for a while from a world that is "too much with us".

PRACTICE SIX: IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Psalm 63:1-2

It is striking that it was in a dry and weary wilderness that David says he "looked" upon God in His sanctuary beholding His power and glory. If you, like David, also thirst for God, you can learn to see Him even in "a dry and weary land". We need only to direct our eyes of faith toward Him.

Just as David had made it his priority to "behold the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4), so in Imaginative Prayer we make it a priority to behold the invisible God. As we often imagine the face of someone we love, so we use our imagination to enter the world of God's Word. We read God's Word in such a way that we know "Christ the Word in the words." (Karl Barth) We do this because we thirst not just to think about God but to experience Him. We enter the Bible with the eyes of our mind wide open and all of our senses firing. Using both our right and left brain we see, feel, hear and taste what we are reading. God longs to meet us as we long to meet with Him in His Word.

Imaginative Prayer works best with a Gospel story, as it is in the Gospels that we meet God revealed to us in the face of Jesus. Here are the steps to Imaginative Prayer:

- Pick a Gospel story to read.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the Living Word, Christ Jesus, in the words you read.
- Read the Gospel story slowly, prayerfully, two or three times.
- Having read the story, now with your mind's eye enter into it. Using your five senses, smell the scents of a Passover meal; see Jesus as he washes the disciples' feet; hear the sounds from the street below; feel the sweat

dripping from your face; listen to what Jesus is saying to the disciples and what they are saying to Him. Linger over the scene and let yourself become part of the story. Let yourself see Jesus coming to you. What do you want to say to Jesus? What do you hear Him saying to you?

- Don't rush through this time of Imaginative Prayer. Pay attention to what you are thinking and feeling as you engage the text. What is it stirring in you?
- When you are finished, pray The Lord's Prayer or The Our Father.

Here are some Gospel passages for you to possibly use in practicing Imaginative Prayer: John 13:1-11; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 15:11-51; Luke 23:39-43; Luke 1:26-38.

PRACTICE SEVEN: ABBA PRAYER

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Galatians 4:6

Developmental psychologists say that children learn to speak between the ages of 14 and 18 months. A little child's first sounds are primary sounds such as "Ma ma, ma ma" or "Da da, da da". A little Jewish child in Jesus' day, in his or her Aramaic-speaking home, would utter first sounds such as "Ab ab ab abba". "Abba" became a little child's first name for "Father", much like "Daddy" in our colloquial speech. Abba denotes intimacy and the closest familiarity. As Jesus has brought us close to the Father's heart, so His Holy Spirit is sent to live within us, prompting us to cry out to Father, "Abba! Daddy!"

I have found that it is one thing to know in my head that I am a child of God through faith in Jesus, but quite another thing for me to really experience and live it. Brennan Manning, in his book *Abba's Child*, introduced me to a spiritual practice that has been so meaningful in my life, and I think it can be for you as well. It is a way of praying that helps take what we know in our heads and makes it real in our hearts. Manning suggests praying the Abba Prayer in the following way:

- Sit, kneel, or lie on your bed for a few moments and let yourself relax in the Father's welcoming presence. A few deep breaths can be helpful here for relaxing.
- Once you have relaxed, breathe in slowly while saying "Abba"; breathe
 out slowly while saying "I belong to You".
- Slowly, prayerfully, repeat these words for several moments: "Abba" (breathing in); "I belong to You" (breathing out).
- End this time of prayerful meditation by praying The Lord's Prayer or The Our Father.
- Take the Abba Prayer with you into your day, and live close to the Father's heart. "Abba, I belong to you. Abba, I belong to you..." You can pray it as you stand in line at the bank, drive on the freeway, or lie in bed at night.

"For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
but you have received a spirit of adoption.
When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing
witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

Romans 8:15-16

Closing Thoughts

We have titled this book Seven Spiritual Practices for Busy People, knowing that you are probably a busy person! You've got people to talk to, things to do, and places to go. But, as we have seen, life's greatest priority is God and living in His presence all of our days.

As you make time in your busy schedule for these spiritual practices you will make a wonderful discovery: Jesus multiplies the time we spend with Him. We might think lack of time is the cause of lack of time with God, but it works just the opposite. Lack of time with God can be the cause of our lack of time!

Think of these seven practices like the "top button" that will help everything else in your life line up right. God refresh and bless you!



Rev. Dr. Timothy L. Smith serves as Executive Director of **Water from Rock Ministries, Inc. (WfR)**, a ministry of spiritual formation assisting people in their journey to greater intimacy with God. WfR is committed to exploring what it means to listen for God and experience His presence in the opportunities and challenges of daily living.

Through our weekly classes (Christ's Teaching for Today's World), devotional publications, WfR website, weekly eVotionals, events and services, WfR seeks to provide 'water' for the wilderness journey. If we might be of any help to you, please feel free to contact us.

For more information on Water from Rock, visit our website at www. waterfromrock.org.

Water from Rock Ministries, Inc.

8776 Shea Blvd., Ste. 106-328 • Scottsdale, AZ 85260
ph 480-998-3338 • fax 480-991-1939
waterfromrock@gmail.com • www.waterfromrock.org

Water from Rock Ministries, Inc. is a tax exempt 501(c)3 religious organization which relies upon charitable contributions from individuals, estates and grants to enable its ministry.

Please consult with your financial adviser to consider including Water from Rock Ministries, Inc. in your will or trust, and as a beneficiary of insurance and retirement accounts.



water from rock

a ministry of Christian renewal

8776 Shea Blvd., Ste. 106-328
Scottsdale, AZ 85260
P: 480.998.3338 F: 480.991.1939
waterfromrock@gmail.com
www.waterfromrock.org

Photo by Rita Smith®