Try a Spiritual Practice

This wellness activity, created by Portico Benefit Services, invites you to adopt a spiritual practice as a way to strengthen your ability to live daily as a new creation in Christ.

Intentional, daily practice can help us calm our thinking, clarify our relationship with God, and restore our sense of self. Less encumbered by fear and anxiety, we’re better able to trust our abilities, accept our limitations, and steward our gifts. As better stewards, we’re more likely, each day, to enhance the lives of others.

1 To prepare, read the information provided. If you’d like, watch Working Hard to Live Well? Perhaps Too Hard. (Described on page 2.)

2 Choose one of three practices described on page 4 along with a phrase or image. Feel free to modify the practice you choose.

3 Add this practice to your life for 28 days. If you’d like, switch practices midstream.

4 Strike through each day you practice on the calendar provided.

Share Your Experience

Invite family, friends, colleagues, or fellow congregation members to do this together. Download copies to print and share at PorticoBenefits.org/wellness.

(Continued on Page 2)
Before You Start …

- Consider this experience a gift to yourself, not a test of your ability.
- Don’t worry about picking the right phrase. It’s just a tool to focus your thoughts. Consider one of these: “Be still and know that I am God.” “Let go.” “Yahweh.”
- Don’t try not to think. Just focus on your phrase or image. When you catch yourself thinking about something, return your mind calmly, patiently, to your phrase. Don’t reprimand yourself.
- Don’t zone out. It’s alright to be aware of things happening around you. Return to your phrase or image if something triggers a chain of thoughts.
- As you settle into the space between your thoughts, embrace this time in the presence of God. Don’t look for God. Know that God is here.
- Close your practice slowly. Notice the peace you feel. Reach for it during your day. If helpful, record your impressions.

Slow Down Video


- Discussion starter created by Portico Benefit Services
- Explores the connection between spiritual practice and living well
- Pastor Jay Hilbinger, Greensboro, North Carolina, describes his experience with centering prayer
- Find this 8-minute video at PorticoBenefits.org/wellness

When in Doubt, Remember

By setting aside fearful, anxious, or random thoughts, I can better experience God’s presence in my life day to day, moment to moment.

Mark the Days

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This morning, following a meditation, I remembered: I’m already what I need to be. My small steps to live well do not prove my worth; I take them for the sake of the world. Then, I began my day less encumbered by anxieties and insecurities, more able to focus on the tasks at hand, better able to listen to others, and accept what I can and can’t control.

As human beings, we seem hard wired to act as though we, alone, are in charge of our lives. Without effort, we tend to forget who we are, and look to the world around us for validation that we are important. When we get that validation, we feel elated. When we don’t, we lapse into anxious, unproductive brooding.

This isn’t news. We all know how destabilizing our own thought patterns can be. On any given day, many of us are, to some degree, emotionally burdened by random, focused, or recurring thoughts.

What Is Spiritual Practice?

We can interrupt this tendency toward negative thinking, first by recognizing it as an aspect of human nature, and then by adopting intentional spiritual practices that help us to be present in the moment.

There are many kinds of spiritual practices. Some involve studied use of prayer and scripture, and have been around for centuries. Others involve bringing spiritual intention to common daily activities. Most involve calming our mental activity in a given moment and increasing the space between our thoughts.

By resting in that space, without the distraction of our own free-wheeling thoughts, we’re better able to find and affirm our relationship with God. Centered by this connection, we approach the rest of our day more emotionally stable, less burdened by uncertainty. It’s kind of like hitting a spiritual reset button.

Byproducts of intentional spiritual practice:

• We listen better to others.
• We hear criticism less personally.
• We forgive ourselves and others more easily.
• We seek and accept help more easily.
• We accept that many things lie outside our control.
• We expect ourselves to manage in times of struggle or chaos.
• We focus on the quality of our own actions and spend less time judging others.
• We live from a place of abundance.

Why not add a spiritual practice to your life? It is one way to remember and walk your truth, daily.

Kathy Shea works at Portico and practices long walks, yoga, and morning meditation.
Three Spiritual Practices

1 Centering Prayer
This modern version of an ancient practice invites us to place ourselves in God’s presence and remain there for a period of time, patiently letting go of our own thoughts as they emerge.

Select a sacred phrase or image on which to focus your mind and a location that allows you to sit comfortably and quietly. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable. Sit with straight back and hands resting open in your lap. Mentally or verbally, begin to repeat your phrase or focus on your image. Start by doing this for one minute. If you’d like, work up to five or more minutes over time. (It can help to set an alarm so you don’t worry about how long you’ve been sitting.)

2 Body Movement
Exercise becomes a spiritual practice when we give it spiritual intention — swimming, walking, yoga, running, cycling, climbing, weight lifting, etc.

Select an activity you know well so you don’t have to think about what you’re doing as you move. Because this is a meditation and not about physical exercise, you may want to avoid choosing an activity around which you’ve built exercise goals.

Select a short phrase or image you can reach for mentally when you’re distracted.

As you move, focus your mind on your breathing and on your rhythmic, steady motion. Speed is not important. Start by bringing this intentional focus to your activity for five minutes. Work up to 10 minutes or more over time.

3 Handwork
Repetitive, reflexive work with our hands can be an opportunity to be more fully with God — knitting, crochet, weaving, whittling, etc.

Select an activity you know well enough that you can do it without reading directions, counting, or watching your fingers. Acknowledge that, in this practice, you’re not focusing on the quality of what you’re doing or creating but are practicing a focused meditation.

Select a short phrase or image you can reach for mentally when you’re distracted.

As you work, turn your mind to the movement of your hands. Focus on your breathing and on your rhythmic, steady motion. Start by doing this for five minutes. Work up to 10 minutes or more over time.

Spirituality is how we are in relationship to God, to other people, to the world around us, and to ourselves. Spirituality is the process of staying engaged in these relationships, the intention we bring to them, and how willing we are to evolve as the relationship affects us.