

12 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

TO GROW IN JESUS CHRIST

DEVOTIONAL 2026

JANUARY • FEBRUARY • MARCH

WELCOME!

We're glad you have chosen to use this devotional!

As you may know, Burke Community Church has decided to make 2026 a year to focus on discipleship - that is, the process of growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ - and we are going to use the model of 12 Spiritual Practices in order to do that. 12 Spiritual Practices to Grow in Jesus Christ is our church's own take on the many books, lessons, sermons and curricula that have been produced through the years to help Christians observe and learn from how Jesus lived, and to then do likewise. These are often called "Spiritual Disciplines," and some examples include prayer, solitude, generosity, worship, confession, compassion, etc. This devotional is designed to walk you through the process of practicing these weekly.

One thing that is especially helpful about doing this as a church family is that you will have the opportunity to share your experiences of growth with others. To that end, we encourage you to join a life group if you haven't yet (<https://www.burkecommunity.com/lifegroups/>), as many of our groups will be discussing these practices together. Diving in on your own is great, too! Maybe you are interested in spending additional time during the week engaging in these practices, and for that we have journals available in The Nook for documenting your deep thoughts :).

No matter how you journey through these practices, one thing is very important to remember: The 12 Spiritual Practices are the means and not the end. The end goal is growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:8 (ESV) articulates this well: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

As a Burke Community Church family, let us grow in Jesus Christ in 2026, and find joy in engaging these Spiritual Practices together!

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Matt 6:9-13

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Gratitude

PRAYER

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,

your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

[PRAYER]

WEEK 1

January 4 to 10

Focus: Connect

Prayer is about people connecting with a personal God.

In his timeless book, Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster opens his chapter on prayer saying "prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father...it is the deepest and highest work of the human spirit." It is no mere coincidence, then, that Jesus models prayer for his disciples starting by connecting with the Father ("Our Father who is in heaven..."). For me, starting prayer by closing my eyes and simply saying "good morning" to my heavenly Father is a critical connection to make before anything else is said. It's almost as if that initial connection is the turn of the ignition that revs the Holy Spirit engine to life! A key first step! Jesus, then, goes on in Matthew 6:9 to say "...hallowed be Your name." Hallowed simply means "sacred" or "holy," and is a word choice Jesus uses to indicate that prayer is something that transcends anything and everything else that might be going on in one's world. As Christians, we should not take for granted this incredible gift that has been given to us by God--access to Himself! Think about the implications! We, as flesh bound, mortal humans are invited to connect with the God of the universe at anytime, anywhere for any reason--a gift made possible through Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the Cross!! My growth step is a renewed commitment to daily accept this incredible gift--to pause, to quiet myself, to allow the eyes of my heart to turn to heaven and simply say, "Our Father, in heaven, Hallowed be Your name."

[PRAYER]

WEEK 1
January 4 to 10

Reflection Questions

- What single word would you use to characterize your prayer life?
- What does having "access to God" mean to you? How is this unique in the Christian faith?
- What steps do you want to take this week to grow in your prayer life?
- What other rhythms or tools help you connect with God (journaling, walking, quiet, music)?

[PRAYER]

WEEK 2

January 11 to 17

Focus: Yield

Prayer helps yield our will to God's

A USC college student who was leading an on-campus Bible study once said once to me, "I'm burned out and discouraged...buy maybe that's what ministry is." Ever felt that way? All of us have been dry, discouraged, and even disillusioned at times, but in John chapter 7:37-39, Jesus painted a much different picture of the life He has for us. "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." So how do we go from dry and disillusioned, to rivers of living water flowing in us and through us? We yield. Yielding is when we say to Jesus, "I can't do it, but you can." It is when we let go of relying on our efforts and lean on His power to work within us. Yielding is getting out of the way and giving God control. You will see a dramatic transformation in your life as you learn to yield to Jesus Christ moment by moment. We get off track, but at any time, you can surrender control back to Him. For me, the D.R.Y. acronym has been really helpful. Ask yourself, do I truly DESIRE to yield control of my life to Jesus right now? Am I willing to REPENT of any sin that may be getting in the way? Am I ready to YIELD to the power of the Holy Spirit and give Him control of my life? Try praying through the D.R.Y. acronym yourself this week and share with someone any difference that you notice making yielding a regular practice in your week.

[PRAYER]

WEEK 2
January 11 to 17

Reflection Questions

- Do you truly DESIRE to yield control of your life to Jesus right now?
- Are you willing to REPENT of any sin that may be getting in the way?
- Are you ready to YIELD to the power of the Holy Spirit and give Him control of your life?

[PRAYER]

WEEK 3
January 18 to 24

Focus: Ask

Prayer includes asking God for his provision

We don't tend to ask for things we already have. And we don't tend to ask for things we don't feel we want or even need. We tend to ask for things we don't have, but know we want or need. To me, this is why Jesus' instruction on prayer in Mt. 6, and specifically what He tells us to ask for, is so important. He reminds us of what we really need and don't have. Jesus tells us to ask for three things: our daily bread (provision), forgiveness, and protection from temptation or evil. The implication is that none of these things is truly available to us except through God's grace. But our natural inclination can tell us otherwise, especially in the success culture we live in. We might believe we earn our daily bread based on our own efforts. And we might think we don't need forgiveness because we are basically good people. And when it comes to temptation, we might believe we're above it, or worse yet, that we're not even sinning. These responses are all products of a pride that is in each one of us, and it's a pride only God can deal with. But Jesus doesn't condemn us. He simply, compassionately, and beautifully invites us. "Ask for My help," He says, "because the burden you put on yourself to perform is too great for you, but My yoke is light." (Mt. 11:30) Make it a point today and every day to see your needs for provision, forgiveness, and protection for what they truly are, and hand them to Him.

[PRAYER]

WEEK 3
January 18 to 24

Reflection Questions

- Do you ever feel guilty asking God for things you want/need?
Explain that feeling.
- What evidence would you give to support that Jesus is a 'giver'?
- If you could rank elements of prayer in order of importance, where would you place asking for help?

[PRAYER]

WEEK 4
January 25 to 31

Focus: Receive

Prayer allows us to receive God's grace and empowers us to offer forgiveness to others

This prayer for forgiveness Jesus models in Matt 6:12 seems like God's forgiveness of our sins is conditional on whether or not we forgive others. Yet that is difficult to square with such theological passages like "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rm 5:8) which indicates unconditional forgiveness. Even more striking is when Jesus doubles down on this important topic in vv.14-15. We should remember, though, these verses from our Savior are not intended to be a theological treatise but a practical application prayer. St. Augustine describes it well: "God gives where He finds empty hands." I love this empty hand analogy, because of its practicality. In other words, you can't receive much of anything if you have closed fists and folded arms. At the same time, we certainly can't give to others with the same "closed-for-business" posture. Which means, the opposite is true--receiving--with open hands--God's forgiveness of our debts leaves us open to share that forgiveness with others. In our sin-soaked world, this is tough. People have hurt us, and extending forgiveness is hard. But this is exactly why this is tucked into the form of a prayer. Prayer reminds us of God's forgiveness, fueling our desire to do likewise with others. My growth step is this: to ensure that my daily prayers would include a reminder of God's gracious forgiveness of my stubborn heart in order that it can fuel my love and forgiveness of others.

[PRAYER]

WEEK 4
January 25 to 31

Reflection Questions

- In what ways has forgiveness been a difficult concept for you?
- Is it harder to receive or offer forgiveness? Why?
- How do you remind yourself that you are forgiven through Jesus Christ?

COMPASSION

1 John 3:17

¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 1
February 1 to 8

Focus: Awareness

Compassion starts with becoming aware of those around you.

There once was an experiment conducted by sociologists in which they gathered a group of people in a circle, gave them a ball, and told them to toss it to one another. But there was a catch, so to speak. All but one of the members was told not to throw the ball to that one member. She was not made aware of this. As play continued, she grew increasingly uncomfortable with being ignored. She tried to assert herself, but the group was adept at excluding her. Eventually, she left the game in despair. The sociologist observed what we all know to be true: that it hurts not to be seen. 1 John 3:17 says "Whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" The question is rhetorical. Such love does not abide in this man. Such a person is like those in the experiment, seeing while choosing not to see. But we must ask ourselves, what if Jesus did that to us? Jesus not only chose to see the broken, He left the throne and came to us. He saw our poverty and entered into it with us. And most incredibly, He chose to die for us to save us from our hopeless state. His sacrifice made it such that His Father, who had to look away from His Son on the cross for our sake, would see us anew. Jesus demonstrated the most profound awareness of the unseen that there has ever been. He asks us now to do the same. He asks us to see our brothers and sisters in need, and to make them feel seen by extending our love. Take note today of who you see and how you respond, and be challenged by Jesus to shape who you are to those in need.

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 1
February 1 to 8

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever felt unseen by those around you? How did you experience that?
- How do you typically respond when you encounter others in need?
- What might you do to help others feel seen, and embrace the fact that they are constantly seen by Jesus?

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 2

February 9 to 15

Focus: *Empathy*

Compassion means developing empathy for those around you

Once you've been a Christian for a while, it's easy to fall into the trap of having a list and checking off the things that you're "supposed" to do. Read the Bible? Check. Pray? Check. Tithe on autopay? Check. Serve? Check. But are we just going through the motions, or are we stopping to look around and see the people that we are serving? Ten years ago I lived in a shelter for women and children experiencing homelessness as the shelter manager. The shelter was owned by sixteen churches in Atlanta, and every day a different church group would bring us breakfast and dinner. Many of the church groups would stay in the kitchen, serving dinner, and talking among themselves while I sat with the ladies in the dining room. There was one church that always stuck out as the sole congregation that came out into the dining room with us, sitting with the women, talking to them, and really investing in their lives by showing interest. Making a meal and dropping off muffins is pretty easy and you can pat yourself on the back and say that you served someone else. But Jesus sat down and broke bread with the poor and the outcasts and spent time with them, getting to know them. Jesus modeled empathy along with love and compassion. As Timothy Keller wrote, "Christ literally walked in our shoes and entered into our affliction." Are you walking alongside those you're serving?

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 2
February 9 to 15

Reflection Questions

- Have you ever had someone come and walk alongside you and made you feel like they truly loved and cared for you?
- Are you able to show someone that kind of empathy? Even if they don't look like you, believe like you, or aren't as well-off as you are?
- How can you be more like Jesus in showing empathy for others?

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 3

February 16 to 22

Focus: Action

Compassion includes sustained (action to help) attentiveness to those in need

As Christians, we all feel something when we see suffering in the world. When we comfort those in need by understanding and sharing their feelings, we show empathy. But when we take specific action to address someone's needs, we show compassion to that person. Empathy and compassion go hand in hand, but compassion has an added active component. Think of empathy as the capacity to feel another's pain. Compassion is also a feeling: it is the concern for another's suffering that motivates a desire to help. So, compassion and empathy are similar but have distinctly different outcomes. Empathy is having awareness of another's emotions and sharing their burdens. Compassion adds an active, caring response for the purpose of alleviating suffering resulting from those emotions. Compassion builds on empathy by adding action. We can see in 1 John 3:17 that as Christians we are under a divine obligation to do what we can to alleviate suffering in this fallen world, especially the suffering of our fellow believers. To paraphrase John, if we see one of our Christian brothers and sisters in need and have the capacity to help, we show God's love and compassion to the world by helping that person. Conversely, if we fail to help John asks, rightly, "how does the love of God abide in us?" This active component of compassion requires a sustained attentiveness to the needs of those around us. The Christian believer is rightly moved by suffering, and having the desire to help, he or she then takes specific steps to alleviate that suffering. What does this look like? John McArthur once noted that "true love is not limited to supreme sacrifices, but shows up in lesser ones." Compassion manifests in sacrificial giving. We can start by just actively listening without judgement, then speaking with kindness and encouragement. But when we do speak, we shouldn't assume we know what the person needs. The first thing to say may simply be "what can I do to help?"

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 3
February 16 to 22

Reflection Questions

- Do you think it is harder to show compassion or empathy?
- Can you think of a time in the past where you may have shown empathy to someone who is suffering, but not compassion?
- How did Jesus show compassion, and how can we as Christian believers follow his example?

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 4

February 23 to 29

Focus: Celebration

Compassion is celebrating receiving and giving God's love

We cannot survive this world on our own. God designed us in His image as relational beings, so we require the community and support of others to get through this life. Jesus instructs us in Luke 6:36 that to live rightly we are to "be compassionate, just as your (Heavenly) Father is compassionate." Providing compassion to others is one way we demonstrate our relationship with God and show God's love to others. Furthermore, activating compassion has exponentially positive results on our community that is worth celebrating! Jesus challenges us notice the Good Samaritan's act of compassion in Luke 10 and to "go and do the same" by helping those in need. Imagine the impact on the community around us if each of us were to operationalize that in our own lives. Now that would truly be something to observe and celebrate! Compassion is a powerful witness because it activates God's love in very practical ways to help others persevere through real challenges. We should strive to act with compassion for the purposeful benefit it delivers and because to share love and compassion is a mark of Christian faith that inspires others towards a relationship with the Lord. Christ directed His disciples to "love one another" like He loved them (John 13:34-35). Notice this is instruction; therefore, it is a choice that we make, even when we may not feel like it. Jesus is our ultimate example of God's love and God's compassion for mankind, and He challenges us to replicate that in our own life for the benefit of the world. God's compassion provides indisputable evidence of His love for all. What a gift to be celebrated! Let's celebrate God's love by demonstrating compassion to each other and to our community. Let's live it out!

[COMPASSION]

WEEK 4

February 23 to 29

Reflection Questions

- When was a time that you benefited from an act of compassion?
- In what ways do you feel challenged to exercise compassion?
- How have you activated your hands for compassion this month?
How might you do so this week?

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 1

March 1 to 7

Focus: *Christ the Center*

All of scripture points to Jesus Christ

In this passage we see how the message of Christ is the catalyst for our positive interactions with one another. It is the message of Christ which transformed the world and brought unity to an otherwise divided Church. It is through the gospel story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, which creates the community we now experience here at Burke Community. When we allow the Word, Himself, to be soaked into our being and we let Him do in us the works that He has planned from the beginning, we will be used greatly for His sake. I find particular interest in the word, "dwell." It is not enough, it seems, to "read" or even to "study." The Word of Christ is instead to dwell in us - to live in us - to make a home out of our hearts and minds. Have you ever felt like the Sunday sermon does not truly impact your week? Have you ever noticed that your morning devotional seems to have a lasting impact of about 30 minutes? Have you ever felt like your Christian beliefs seem separated from your lifestyle throughout the week? Letting the Word of Christ dwell in your life makes all the difference. Try focusing on one word or idea from each experience in the Bible. Meditate on it by thinking about it on your way to work or on your way to the store. I have a friend who keeps sticky notes in his car. Whenever he is meditating on a particular verse or word in a verse, he writes it on a sticky note and attached it to his dashboard. This is a beautiful example of the practice of meditation and letting the Word dwell in you. Letting the Word of Christ dwell in you does not only benefit your own spiritual formation, though. It benefits the Church. The overarching teaching in this chapter is that when we put off the old self and put on the new self, the Church benefits. This is the effect of Christ's ministry. He came, lived, died, resurrected and ascended so that His people might be united under His name.

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 1

March 1 to 7

Reflection Questions

- What brother or sister in Christ can you be an encouragement to this week?
- How can you let the Word of Christ dwell in you today?
- How does the message of Christ as a unifying force guide our interactions with believers and non-believers alike?

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 2
March 8 to 14

Focus: Teach

Scripture is to be taught faithfully and earnestly

John Chrisostom, in the 4th century, said "Nothing so builds up believers as the sacred Scriptures; let us hear them continually, for they are our greatest security." If we are honest with ourselves, I wonder if being taught the "sacred Scriptures" would be on our Top 10 list of "securities." Money, shelter, love, health are surely somewhere near the top of yours--but, the "sacred scripture?" Yup! The verse we are studying in Col 3 is in the context of the Apostle Paul talking about putting on the "new self" (our new identity as beloved child of God!) and so in v.16 we learn that one of the key ways to live well as a Child of God is by hearing and absorbing the Word of God--which is embodied in Jesus Christ, himself! Anyone who has been taught the Word of Christ for any amount of time knows this--the Holy Spirit uses it to impact our lives directly--to influence our decisions, our relationships, our confidence in our new identity in Christ, etc...For me, one of the first things that happened after I became a Christian my freshman year in High School was to be taught four key verses to help me understand my faith in Christ more. Having those memorized and deep in my heart has kept me secure through some pretty tough times along the way. I'm sure some of you reading this might have a story or two about someone who has taught you a verse and how that has paid dividends in your life as well! My personal growth step is to have heightened awareness of moments when I'm being taught the Word of Christ, and to understand how they are, ultimately, my greatest security!

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 2

March 8 to 14

Reflection Questions

- How has the scripture (Word of Christ) impacted your life?
- In what way do you agree or disagree that hearing the sacred scripture is our "greatest security?"
- What is something you can do this month to allow scripture to teach and admonish your life?

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 3
March 15 to 21

Focus: Sing

Scripture is to be sung, memorized and recited to become a part of the Christian's life

The Bible mentions singing over 400 times and gives 50 direct commands to sing. Clearly, music is close to the heart of God. And how amazing it is that our God is not silent! He is a singing God. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us, "He will rejoice over you with singing." Imagine that: the Creator of the universe sings over His people with joy! HE sings over you and me!

Throughout Scripture, we see God's people joining in that song. The Psalms were written as prayers, laments, and praises to be sung back to Him. The same God who gives us words of worship invites us to lift our voices in response. And Jesus, the eternal Word, the One through whom all things were created, became human and sang the very songs written by Him and for Him. In Jesus, every Psalm, every melody of hope, longing, and praise found its true and complete fulfillment.

Throughout history, Scripture has been sung, memorized, and recited, not just read. The Word of God was meant to dwell richly within us, shaping both our minds and our melodies. Every verse, every Psalm, every chorus becomes a way to carry God's truth deep into our hearts and daily lives.

Now, when we sing, we echo the song of Heaven. Each hymn, each word of praise, each melody is a rehearsal, a glimpse of the eternal worship we will one day offer to Christ face-to-face. This understanding has transformed the way I worship. I no longer sing with just my voice, but with my whole heart, allowing God's Word to form each note as an act of love and anticipation for the day I see Him in glory.

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 3
March 15 to 21

Reflection Questions

- What does it mean to you that God rejoices over His people with singing?
- In what ways can singing (or music in general) draw you closer to God in your daily walk?
- In what ways can singing or reciting Scripture help deepen your connection to God's Word in everyday life?

Focus: *Gratitude*

Scripture should be studied and sung with a heart of gratitude

We've been studying the important aspects of the "Word of Christ" this month in Col 3:16, and we come now to its critical conclusion: "with gratitude (or grace) in your hearts to God." Paul is saying the manner in which you are to do all of these things (dwell in Christ's word, teach and admonish, sing psalms, etc) is with a heart of charis (greek for grace or gratitude). The word is used abundantly in Paul's writings as well as the Gospel of John and Acts to define God's love (Grace) for us through Christ Jesus, and so it makes sense that the way we should encounter God's word is by reflecting the very charis He shows to us. In John Ortberg's book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, he gives a practical tip as to how we may approach the study of scripture with grace and gratitude when he says "the goal is not for us to get through the scriptures, but for the scriptures to get through us." Go ahead. Read that again. Have you ever approached Bible reading as a task to complete? Something to check off the list so you could feel like a more accomplished Christian? If so, you are not alone. It's pretty common actually. But if the apostle Paul is asking us to approach the scripture with charis in our hearts, it stands to reason this is only possible if our hearts are first impacted by the Scripture in such a way that we experience God's grace and respond in kind--with gratitude. What does this look like? For me, my growth step is to allow time for the scripture to impact me, so I'll try to go slowly. I'll pause if I need to, especially if something needs a little more time to soak in. Finally, I'm looking for ways that God is showing me charis through His Word. And I when I receive this grace from Him, I plan to take the time to respond with a heart of gratitude for His great love!

[SCRIPTURE]

WEEK 4
March 22 to 28

Reflection Questions

- How would you characterize your "approach" to scripture reading as a Christian?
- How does "gratitude" play a role in your understanding of God's Word?
- How would you encourage someone who is struggling with connecting to God through the Scripture?



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