

When the Anxieties Run High, Turn to God in Prayer, Spiritual Disciplines
By Pastor Hope Deutscher, who is completing year 1 of a 2-year spiritual direction program with the *Christos Center for Spiritual Formation*

When Experiencing Times of Change by Teresa of Avila

Let nothing upset you, let nothing worry you, everything is changing, God alone is changeless, patience attains the goal, she who has God lacks nothing, God alone fulfills his every need.

During this time when life brings anxieties, worries, and uncertainties, we may not be responding like Teresa of Avila, but I find it can be helpful to reframe what I'm focusing on. I find that if I focus on the 24 hours news channel, my anxieties rise as fast as the statistic ticker on the channel go up. So how am I "coping" with our new reality? I try to follow a daily "schedule" – it gives me some structure of how to handle day after day at home. What has been the most helpful is to practice some of the contemplative practices listed below to focus on God's presence and God's Word. When I can't sleep at night, I pray or I open up the devotional on my bedside table. I am choosing to focus on prayer and spiritual practices that bring me closer to God. I invite you to choose one or several of the practices listed below to practice and experience God's presence.

Spiritual Practices

Journaling – Writing down or preparing a journal or scrapbook of how we are feeling, what we are experiencing daily/weekly can help us see where God's presence is in one's life and the life around us. Journaling can include writing, gathering and organizing drawings, articles, images, poems, quotes and other things that reflect what we are experiencing on a given day or time.

Lectio Divina/Visio Divina– Lectio Divina invites us into God's presence and to listen for God's particular loving word *to me* at this particular moment in time. Read through a scripture passage (such as the lectionary texts for Sunday) three times. After you read it, reflect on what words or phrases speak to you or touch your heart? Read the text a second time – how do the chosen words/phrases touch your life? Read a third time – and pray on how God's Words spoke to you. This can be done alone or if with your family, each person can share their insights. Lectio Divina is a way to pray the scriptures. Visio Divina, holy seeing, is a way to pray with the eyes. As you look at a piece of artwork or if you are walking in nature, what stirs in you? You are not worshipping the image, but instead feeling God's presence.

Devotional Reading – There are a variety of devotional books that have been written. Begin your day reading a devotional or when the anxiety rises, pick up the devotional again and read a word from God. You'll be surprised how often a devotional reading can be just what you need to hear in that moment!

Celebration – Identify and pursue the things that bring the heart deep joy! This could mean calling a friend, making a special meal, laughing, listening to music or dancing, etc. Celebrate those moments, connecting with God in the moment and as you reflect on the joyful moments.

Gratitude – Gratitude is a loving and thankful response towards God and God's presence with us and within the world. Take note of the gifts throughout the day, keep a gratitude journal of the positive things that happened in a day, or write thank you notes expressing your thanks!

Prayer Walking – As the weather gets warmer, we can go for a quiet walk, listening to God’s creation and seeing the budding of trees and green sprouts shooting up from the ground. During our walk, we take in God’s creation and use this time to pray to God for what is on our hearts.

Worship – Worship happens when we intentionally spend time in prayer and praising God. Worship reveals what is important to us. First, watch the online GPR/Living Grace worship service; other ways you can worship God include: listening to worship music online or on the radio; reflect on how does worshipping alone and worshipping with other people affect you?; What name for God – Shepherd, Lord, Father, Bread of Life, etc. – best describes your relationship with God right now?

Community – Community exists when people connect authentically and in caring ways with one another. During this time of physical distancing, we have found creative ways to be in community – through phone calls; online video conference calls; meeting in parking lots and standing or sitting 6-feet apart; holding school parades as vehicles pass down the street, horns honking; and standing outside care facilities talking to loved ones through glass windows. As the Body of Christ, we may be physically separated, but we spiritually united in one by Christ. Take some time to check in on someone you haven’t talked to in a while.

Rest, Self-Care, Sabbath – Sleep deprivation and running on empty are often our norms in our normal schedule. Add in working from home and now we may feel like we need to check on work all the time or as the clock ticks down the minutes, we don’t realize that work bleeds over into family time. We all have limits – our energy becomes drained; we are exhausted and we’re struggling to find a new normal as we teach our kids the word “ration” as they stare into the abyss of the pantry or fridge for the umpteenth time. But thankfully God gives us rhythms of rest and work. Set a daily schedule for you and your family, take a day off from work (Sabbath) and turn off or unplug from electronics. Find blessings in taking time to delight in God, family, the spring season and new growth, and meal times.

Examen – At the end of the day, taking time to journal/reflect on the day and where God’s presence was and was not felt. Begin by asking for what moment today am I grateful for/least grateful for? What was life-giving to me today? And where did I experience a connection with God? Pay attention to your emotions. Choose one feature of the day and pray about it. End by looking towards tomorrow and where you’ll connect with God. Visit this website:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>.

Breath Prayer – There are a variety of ways to pray. One of them is called Breath Prayer, which is linked to the pattern of breathing in and breathing out using abdominal breathing (put hand on your stomach and you’ll feel it move in/out), rather than shallow shoulder breathing. As you breathe in, call on a Biblical name or image of God; as you breathe out, say a simple phrase of God’s desire for you. Here are a few prayers:

Breath in: <i>Healer...</i>	Breath out: <i>Speak the word and I shall be healed;</i>
Breath in: <i>Be still...</i>	Breath out: <i>and know that I am God;</i>
Breath in: <i>I stand...</i>	Breath out: <i>Beneath the Cross;</i> or
Breath in: <i>When I am afraid...</i>	Breath out: <i>I will trust you.</i>

May God bless you as you walk with him in prayer and through these spiritual practices.