

A close-up photograph of an olive branch with several green olives. The leaves are elongated and have a silvery-green hue. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green. The text 'Basic Practice' is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, sans-serif font, set against a dark green rectangular background.

# Basic Practice



## **The trellis and the vine (John 15)**

Spiritual leader Dallas Willard writes that "a discipline is an activity in our power, which we pursue in order to become able to do what we cannot do by direct effort." The discipline (or some say the 'spiritual practice') forms a structure by which the soul can grow. St. John of the Cross called spiritual disciplines a 'trellis' - like you'd use for growing a grape vine or bougainvillea. The trellis is a lattice made of wood and it gives something for the living vine to hold on to and grow up. In the same way, spiritual disciplines provide some structure for the soul to grow. Having the spiritual discipline doesn't mean you grow - that comes from God. But they can be helpful to create the space for God to grow you.

## Hearing Jesus speak to me during listening prayer:

### Being with Jesus. (Encounter)

Jesus shows us that prayer is all about our relationship and life with the Father. We learn how to relate to the Father in different ways and through different types of prayer. With listening prayer we ask the question: "What is it like to actually hear from God?" We will explore what it is like to hear from the Spirit. In this Practice we allow the Holy Spirit access to our imaginations, which were created and given by God.

In the Gospel accounts we get to see firsthand what it was like for the perfect human, Jesus, to listen to the voice of the Father. There is a lot we can learn from how Jesus talks to and listens to God in prayer, but notice that there are only a couple times in the Gospel accounts where the Father audibly speaks to Jesus. The majority of the time Jesus hears his Father speak inaudibly and internally by the Spirit. Why is that? We don't know for sure, but it certainly does show us that this was normal for Jesus, and that it can, therefore, be normal for his followers.

We often express our prayers out loud to the Father, yet hear the response silently in our minds as God's thoughts mingle with our thoughts. If we are honest, sometimes it can be intimidating to ask God to speak. What kinds of things can we expect the Father to say?

Like with prophecy described in 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, the goal of the Father in listening prayer is always to strengthen, encourage, and comfort. If the Spirit does show us where something is off in our life, he calls us to repentance – not in shame, but to bring us to a place where we can experience more of his love and refreshing in our lives.

As you begin, remember that all of relationship with God starts and ends with God being good and loving. Imagine yourself as a child crawling up into the lap of your good Father, who loves you unconditionally. He wants nothing more than to be close to you and remind you of his love.

*But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.*

*1 Corinthians 14:3-4*

## **DO THIS PRACTICE AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR SMALL GROUP: (10-30 MINUTES)**

Have one member of the group sit in the middle of the room. This will be the person you are going to listen on behalf of. This is simply a time to ask the Father what he wants to say about the person. You are asking for God to encourage them and to speak edifying words over them.

1. Start by asking Jesus to silence all other voices in the room – distractions in our minds, any spirit that isn't the Holy Spirit, etc – so that you can only hear the voice of the Father.
2. Ask the Father to give you a word, picture, Scripture, or a song for the person. Take turns sharing what you hear.
3. Ask the person if the things being shared make sense to them and if they are able to receive them. (i.e. Do they believe what the Father is saying to them through the Community?)
4. Ask the Father some follow up questions:
  - What do you want us to know about this?
  - Is there anything else you want to say to them?
5. Remember: This is a time to bless the person and affirm the Father's love over them.

## PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK (10 MINUTES)

1. Start by asking Jesus to silence all other voices in the room, so that you can only hear the voice of the Father. Specifically ask Jesus to silence the voice of our enemy and any demonic forces. Also, ask Jesus to quiet any of the distracting thoughts in your mind.
2. Begin with confession and forgiveness. Ask the Father to bring to mind anything you don't feel forgiven for. If there is anything, imagine taking it to the cross and leaving it there. Then ask the Father if there is anyone you need to forgive. If there is, imagine releasing this person and any offenses.
3. Invite God to bring to mind what he wants to address. Perhaps explore some of these prompts:
  - Is there anything I believe about myself that is not true? What does the Father want to replace it with?
  - Ask the Father if there are any other things that He wants to speak to you about.
4. When the Father brings something to mind, ask some follow up questions:
  - What do you want me to know about this?
  - Is there anything else? (Don't be afraid to wait longer and just enjoy the time of stillness in the presence of the Father.)
5. Here are a couple common frustrations when doing listening prayer:
  - What if you ask God to speak and there is nothing or you see just blackness in your mind's eye? If this is the case then ask the Father, "What do you want me to know about

this?” Perhaps the blackness is an invitation into peace or rest. Press in and wait in his presence.

- What if it’s really hard to focus? Ask the Father, “What do you want me to know about this?” And remember that this is a Practice, it can take some time.
- If you are not hearing anything, ask the Father if there is a Scripture that He wants to bring to mind.

6. Remember that, overall, this is a time to be deepening your relationship with the Father. Maybe this is just a time to relax with the God and receive his love.
7. Pray or ask someone to pray. Thank God for speaking.

#### FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION QUESTIONS (10-15 MINUTES)

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week’s Practice?
2. What would you love to experience while trying listening prayer?
3. What fears do you have?

#### TAKE TIME TO CLOSE YOUR SESSION IN PRAYER (10 MINUTES)



## **Active and passive spirituality: (Matthew 25:31-46)**

### **Being with Jesus. (Encounter)**

While a new concept to many of us in the late modern, Western church, the paradigm of active and passive spirituality has a long tradition in church history. By “active spirituality,” we mean aspects of our spirituality that feel more like we’re doing something: spiritual disciplines, church activity, even the work therapy or spiritual formation. By “passive spirituality,” we mean aspects of our life with Jesus that feel more like God is the one doing something in us, and our role is simply to welcome his work, rather than fight it. As Jean Pierre de Caussade put it, to “suffer lovingly.” Some call this “radical acceptance.” To cease striving to fix all the problems of your life, and recognize that, at some level, many of them just can’t be fixed. They can only be embraced, grieved, forgiven, and turned into love and compassion.

For practice, here is a short journaling exercise to help you name Jesus’ invitations to you in both the active and passive aspects of your apprenticeship.

## DO THIS PRACTICE RIGHT NOW (15–30 MINUTES)

### 1. Come to quiet.

- Take a few deep breaths. Release any anxiety or anger, and receive the Spirit's peace.
- Invite the Spirit to illuminate your mind with his voice.

### 2. Take 5–10 minutes and respond to this question in your journal: What does active spirituality look like in my life right now?

- Here are a few clarifying questions:

- What sins and struggles am I currently facing in my apprenticeship to Jesus?

- Where am I really getting traction in my freedom from sin and spiritual journey to love like Jesus loved? (e.g. listening prayer, fasting, therapy, a close friendship, addiction recovery, reading, a podcast, etc.)

- What practices/spiritual disciplines form the trellis of my life with Jesus? The “trellis to my vine” of abiding?

- Do I have a rule of life? (i.e. a set of habits, practices, and principles to which I commit my life as a way of becoming more like Jesus) If so, what is it? Do I have it in writing?

- Is there a next step Jesus is calling me to take? An “action” he’s calling me to do in this stage of my apprenticeship and season of life?

**3. Now take 5–10 minutes and journal your response to this question: What does passive spirituality look like in my life right now?**

- Here are a few clarifying questions:

- Where is the pain point in my life currently? The ache?

- Is there a problem in my life I'm trying to fix that isn't really fixable? Where perhaps I need to practice acceptance?

- Are there any areas where I'm trying to manipulate the circumstances of my life in order to be happy, rather than partnering with Jesus to become a more loving, joyful, peaceful person?

- Are there any people I've hurt in my attempt to manipulate the externals of my life to meet my "ideal"? What would repentance and reconciliation look like with them?

- What are Jesus' invitations to me in this stage and season?

## **Forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50)**

### **Become like Jesus. (Respond)**

Forgiveness is integral in our discipleship to Jesus. We live in a world polluted by sin and shame, and relationships in this broken world are often marked by disappointment, loss, and pain. The call of God throughout the Scriptures is to release those who sin against us from our personal right to collect on the moral debt for their offense. We see this embodied best in the person of Jesus himself, who, in the face of sin, chose not to look the other way nor to pay the person back, but to deal with the sins committed against him in the most compelling way: by forgiving them.

Now, it's important to note that forgiveness does not mean forgetting. It is not the same thing as reconciliation. It is not the same thing as allowing someone who has hurt you to be back in your life. It is not always a one-time event; oftentimes it is something we have to keep choosing.

If we're honest, forgiveness is one of the most countercultural practices of Jesus. By definition, forgiveness is an unmerited gift – it is given to someone who does not deserve it. The cost of forgiveness is great, but the outcome in the lives of those who forgive is greater still. Through the process of forgiving and being forgiven we can experience freedom, wholeness, and intimacy with God and others, all of which is part of life as Jesus intended. For this week's Practice, we want to reflect on the gift of God's forgiveness and how it leads us to forgive others.

**OPEN TO THE BIBLE INDIVIDUALLY OR TOGETHER (10 MINUTES)**

Read or ask somebody to read Luke 7:36-50.

Talk about the following questions:

1. What parts of the Pharisee's attitude do you relate to?
2. What is so compelling about the way that Jesus interacts with this woman?
3. How have you seen the correlation between forgiveness and love in your own life?

### **Part 1: Being Forgiven by God (for individual or group use)**

- Have someone invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us and allow us to hear his voice as we engage in listening prayer.
- Ask the Holy Spirit:
  - Is there anything in my life for which I need to repent?  
(Allow people time to sit with this question. If anyone feels led to confess something out loud, give them the space to do so.)
  - Is there anything in my life of which I haven't fully received God's forgiveness? (As people feel comfortable, invite them to share with your triad.)
  - Spend time praying over those who need to receive or know the forgiveness of God in their lives. They don't need to go into detail or disclose any information, this is a space to invite the Spirit to heal and reveal the forgiveness that is their's in Jesus.

## **Part 2: Who Do I Need to Forgive?**

- Invite or ask someone to invite the Holy Spirit to reveal specific offenses, people, or circumstances in which forgiveness needs to take place. (Give the Spirit time to speak and people time to listen.)
- It is important to record what you sense the Spirit speaking to you, so that you can take the time this week to process and pray through it. (Note: now is not necessarily a space to forgive, but a time to begin a conversation with the Spirit about how we enter into our spiritual responsibility to forgive in light of the forgiveness we've received from him.)

### **PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK:**

The practice for this week is fairly simple. If you sense the Spirit reveal to you a person, offense, or circumstance in which He is inviting forgiveness, take time this week to explore that further. If you did not sense something from the Spirit, set aside time this week to ask Him again who you need to forgive. Again, forgiveness is a process, not an event. Give yourself grace as you work through the pain you've experienced, but make sure to be accountable to one another along the way.

**WORK THROUGH THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10-15 MINUTES)**

1. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's forgiveness practice?
2. Has your understanding of forgiveness changed this week? In what ways?
3. What is your greatest fear when it comes to forgiveness?

**TAKE TIME TO CLOSE YOUR SESSION WITH PRAYER (10 MINUTES)**

## Reconciliation (Luke 19:1-10)

### Do what Jesus would do. (Transform)

Consider what it means to be forgiven and to release others, and transform pain into blessing. As the Spirit leads us to places of greater understanding and healing, He also reveals the ways we've hurt others and the need to make it right. For the follower of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit convicts, there must be a response. Often, in the face of conviction we are tempted to either ignore what He says or be paralyzed by our guilt and shame. In these moments it is imperative that we remember the truth: conviction from the Spirit is always an invitation to life and freedom. Guilt and shame are not from God and lead us to greater bondage.

Recall that forgiveness is our personal act to release the one who sinned against us from our personal right to collect on the moral debt (to pay them back) for their offense, with or without their participation in the process. Reconciliation, however, is when we move toward another and work to restore a broken relationship. As you can imagine, it is complicated because while forgiveness takes one person, reconciliation takes two.

For this practice we'll be spending some time in listening prayer and asking the Spirit if there is anyone we've wronged with whom we need to reconcile or seek forgiveness. Then, we'll explore and evaluate where we are in the process of reconciliation and determine our next steps.



## **DO THIS PRACTICE INDIVIDUALLY OR TOGETHER: (10-30 MINUTES)**

Break up into triads (3-4 people) and designate a leader within that group. Put away your phones or any other distractions, and get comfortable.

Read Luke 19:1-10 out loud. Spend some time in listening prayer.

### **Part 1: Who have I wronged?**

- Invite or ask someone to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us and allow us to hear his voice as we engage in listening prayer.
- Ask the Holy Spirit:
- Is there anyone in my past or present whom I have wronged?
- Have I reconciled with this person?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an image of what it would look like to be reconciled with this person.
- Spend time sharing and confessing what the Spirit has revealed.

## **Part 2: What are my next steps?**

- Consider the five steps of reconciliation as: conviction, confession (apology), repentance, restitution, and reconciliation. Take a moment to sit with these steps and share where you are at in the process of reconciliation with the person revealed to you in Part 1.
- Consider the step you're on and ask the Spirit to reveal to you what it would take to move you forward to the next step. If the Spirit just now convicted you, ask Him what it would look like to move onto the next step (confession/apology).

Disclaimer: Depending on the severity of the circumstances, the person you wounded may not be ready to enter the process of reconciliation. Be mindful and sensitive to their journey. Your role is not to make them ready, but to be obedient to what the Spirit is asking of you.

## PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

**Option 1:** If the Spirit did not reveal someone tonight with whom you need to reconcile, spend some time in listening prayer asking Him again.

**Option 2:** If the Spirit did not reveal the next step you need to take in reconciliation, spend some time in listening prayer asking Him again.

**Option 3:** If the Spirit revealed someone with whom you need to reconcile and you know where you are at in the process of reconciliation, take time in listening prayer and ask the Spirit what it looks like to practically take that next step.

- Maybe it means working through this with a counselor.
- Maybe it means confessing this to your mentor, small group leader or a trusted friend.
- Keep in mind that taking the next step might not happen this week. That's ok. The goal is to be actively working towards it.

### WORK THROUGH THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (10-15 MINUTES)

1. What is the hardest part of reconciliation for you?
2. What are you most looking forward to in being reconciled with this person?

### TAKE TIME TO CLOSE YOUR SESSION IN PRAYER (10 MINUTES)

