

EMBODIED PARTICIPATION

Practice: Engaging your senses within communal practices

Purpose: Forming spiritual perception through embodied worship and shared attention to God who gives to us lavishly

Passages: 2 Corinthians 2:15 - "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing." Jesus (God enfleshed), who made present and visible the realm of the invisible spirit, expresses in its fullness what embodied participation looks like by using earthly elements (bread, wine, water...) to show us the divine in human form.

Communal worship trains us to perceive God in and through material reality. It helps us to experience God as truly manifest and concretely active in daily life (Richard Foster). Throughout Christian history, believers have experienced physical senses in worship as pathways of grace:

- + Food, flowers, candles (smell)
- + Singing, gospeling (hearing)
- + Bread and wine - communion (taste)
- + Water - baptism (touch)
- + Artwork, architecture, plants and flowers (sight)

BEAUTY and CREATION

Practice: Immersing in creation and created works (art, music)

Purpose: Awakening desires and senses through beauty

Passages: Psalm 8, Psalm 19, Psalm 33, Psalm 65, Psalm 148

Rory Noland reminds us that being a shepherd, David spent a lot of time outdoors. As a result, he was constantly in awe of God's creation: "the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe" (Ps 65:5-8).

- + Beauty awakens the soul's longing
- + Artwork and music can be "windows to heaven"
- + Wonder trains the heart to receive instead of consume

Explore: walking in nature, gazing at a sunset, steeping in art and music, enjoying the making and savoring of food with friends.

ACTS of MERCY and LOVE

Practice: Hospitality, giving to those in need, caring for the poor

Purpose: Perceiving Christ in our neighbors

Passages: Gen 1:26-29; Micah 6:8; Hosea 6:6; Matt 9:13; Mark 12:28-34

Galatians 5:14 - "For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Spiritual perception is not merely inward. Christians learned to "see Christ" in the vulnerable (Matt 25). Acts of relational service purifies vision by reordering love in its proper place. Taken as a whole, our work is "to be in God for the world, for God so loves the world" (Robert Mulholland).

Try fasting from something that you may be overly attached to (money, time, screens, spending, sports, food/drink, success, etc).

Utilize that savings to bless another person or group.

...crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

1 PETER 2:2-3

A Lenten Guide to CULTIVATING the SPIRITUAL SENSES

Scripture often uses the language of the senses to describe our relationship with the Triune God. The psalmist sings, "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8; 1 Pet. 2:3). David speaks of thirsting for God and of God's hand holding him (Ps. 63). Jesus promises that "the pure in heart will see God" (Matt. 5:8). Paul writes that the faithful are the "sweet aroma of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15).

Historically, Christians have likened the "spiritual senses" to our physical senses. Just as we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell in the physical world, so we also perceive God spiritually. Together, these form a full range of human perception.

To be fully human—to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29)—is to be freed to use this whole range of embodied and spiritual perception to know, receive, and grow in God's love. Our senses are alive and well when we begin to think, feel, and act as Jesus does.

Cross Training

In Romans, Paul names the deep human struggle into which we are born—a condition in which saying no to God often feels easier than saying yes (Rowan Williams).

This guide offers simple practices to retrain our hearts: to say no—even to good things—that keep us from true flourishing, and yes to God, who is the source of love, goodness, beauty, and truth. Following ancient Christian guides, our journey involves:

- + **Letting Go** of all that keeps us from God's love
- + **Learning to Taste and See** God's love
- + **Living in God's Love** in and through relationships

As Hans Urs von Balthasar reminds us, our spiritual senses awaken as we share in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. This is the meaning of the season of Lent: the way of Jesus takes the form of the cross.

This means that spiritual disciplines are not life-hacks for self-improvement. In fact, against our modern 'wellness' culture, they may feel stretching or even uncomfortable at first. But over time, they open us to God's love, forming in us a holy sorrow for all that is separated from that love—and a compassion that reflects Christ's own self-giving heart (Geoff Holsclaw).

Feel free to choose one of the seven practices. The goal is not to go through all of them, or to take the place of how you are already connecting with God. You are invited to...

*Taste and see that the Lord is good;
blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

PSALM 34:8

SCRIPTURE

Practice: Slow, prayerful reading

Purpose: Reading for transformation (not just information)

Passages: Psalms 1, 2, 19, 34, 42, 63; Romans 8; Ephesians 3:14-21

Early monastic teachers believed Scripture reshapes our perception. The father Augustine wrote that Scripture heals disordered loves by retraining desire. In his *City of God*, he defined virtue as "rightly ordered love." He explains in his work *On Christian Doctrine*: "To love things, that is to say, in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less." Through repeated meditation, believers learn to:

+ See reality through God's story

+ Hear God's voice in the text

+ Taste the goodness of God (Psalm 34:8)

Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)

Adapted from Sacred Rhythms, by Ruth Haley Barton

READY in silence for 2 minutes and open your heart/mind to God.

READ the passage slowly. Listen to the word/phrase that stands out. What is capturing my attention? What is God evoking in me?

REFLECT: After reading again, ask God: How does this word/phrase connect with my life now? Stay curious.

RESPOND: What is your truest response to God's invitation?

REST in God's presence without agenda and receive His love.

RESOLVE: How am I choosing to live this out in my life?

EXAMEN and DISCERNMENT

Practice: Daily review and sifting of life-giving and draining moments

Purpose: Recognizing God's movements in ordinary life

Passages: Ps 139; Rom 12:1-2; Heb 5:4; 1 Cor 2:14; Phil 1:9-10

Developed by Ignatius of Loyola, the Examen sharpens our senses and awareness. It teaches believers to:

+ Notice interior movements

+ Distinguish between what is life-giving and draining

+ Grow in relational attunement to God

Prayer of Examen

Adapted from Ignatius (and Larry Warner, Dennis & Sheila F. Linn)

RECOGNIZE Joy

What am I most grateful for? (Gratitude moves us to relational joy)

REQUEST Understanding

Ask God to reveal truth about yourself, others, and God's presence with you in your life.

REVIEW the Day

When did I feel the most alive? When did I sense life draining?

When did I experience connection?

When did I experience disconnection?

What was today's high point? What was today's low point?

Do you notice any themes or patterns of life or feeling drained?

Where do you sense God with you in these moments today?

Reflect on God being glad to be with you (even in the lows).

RETURN to God

Confess when you went your own way and disconnected from your true self, others, and God? Do you need to ask forgiveness?

RENEW Your Relationship

Commit your day to God. Remember, God is glad to be with you.

FASTING

Practice: Restraining from food, or any thing, for a specific time

Purpose: Cleansing the heart from distraction and/or disordered attachment (things we cling to instead of God)

Passages: Joel 2:12 - "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning..."

Isaiah 58:6 - "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

Matt 6:16 - "And when you fast, do not look like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others."

The Desert Fathers and Mothers believed excess dulls perception. This was not rejection of the body, but recalibration of desire. By moderating bodily appetites, they sought:

+ Freedom from compulsions

+ Clarity of heart

+ Heightened awareness of subtle movements of grace

Fast Fridays

Begin by joining us for Fast Fridays as we seek God together. Start by skipping one meal. If you already fast, try extending to the full day. Remember, it's not about getting good at fasting or 'crushing' a discipline. The purpose is recalibrating your heart with God.

SOLITUDE

Practice: Silent prayer, contemplation, and recollection

Purpose: Attentiveness to God's indwelling presence

Passages: Psalm 42; Ephesians 1, 3:14-21; John; 1 John

Richard Foster reminds us that "John the apostle was one of the first to follow Jesus and one of the last at the foot of the cross. Between those two events he was with Jesus almost constantly. And following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, John lingered longer and contemplated more deeply than most on the Christ event. John began wanting a seat of power (Mark 10), and by the end of his life, he rested in his true identity as the beloved. John makes it clear that our love is not an originating love but a responding love: 'We love because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19)."

John of the Cross says that God cannot be thought but can be loved. By this he meant that God cannot be grasped by the mind but can be known by the heart. The route to this heart knowing is contemplation—the apprehension that is uncluttered by thought. It is based on direct personal encounter. It is making space in our hearts for the touch of the Loving and Living God, and then allowing that touch to flow through the rest of our being and out into the world (David Benner). It begins with silence, where:

+ The "eye of the heart" becomes illumined

+ Subtle attachments surface

+ We learn to perceive God beyond words

Breath Prayer

Root me in Your love God... [inhale]

Set me free from _____ [exhale]

Silent Prayer

Choose a sacred time and space. Deciding beforehand will help you keep your commitment. Resistance is normal—most of us live distracted lives. Set a timer (5, 10, or 20 minutes, etc.). Choose an anchor word such as *love*, *Jesus*, *God*, or *Spirit*—a word you can return to when distractions arise. Afterward, spend some time journaling what you noticed and sensed during the practice. Conclude with gratitude, thanking God for the time.