

# DAILY PRACTICES

## *For God's People*



Cultivating Virtues  
of Christian Living

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# Introduction

All of life is a journey. We are always traveling to Christ even as we travel with Christ. To be a disciple, therefore, is to shape one's life for the journey. A disciple is one who forms his or her life around certain disciplines, which, in turn, allows him or her to grow into the likeness of Christ.

During this time in the Church, we have had more than enough conversation about what constitutes right belief. It is time for us to focus instead on right behavior. How is a Christian to behave? Could someone, looking at our lives, know that we were indeed Christians?

For centuries, Moral Theology focused on the development of character. The teaching was that each person ought to aspire to incarnate the Christian virtues in his or her life. Quite simply, one should think of the person God wishes for that person to be and then ask what is a behavior that will move me closer to that goal. How can I make that behavior a habit, that habit a disposition, so that this disposition will form my character and bring me closer to holiness? We have lost this way of speaking of ethics, but in so doing, we have also lost the language of disciplines and virtues.

I think this a great loss. Our world desperately needs more love and faith and hope. Our world needs beacons of light and examples of goodness.

The role of the Church is to teach its members how to lead a virtuous life so that individuals will be changed into disciples and those disciples will be instruments through which God will transform the world into the Kingdom. To discipline oneself is to change one's behavior by changing one's habits. To become a disciple is to offer one's life to serve Christ every moment of every day.

This program is a tool for discipleship. It is a means by which pilgrims on their way to the Celestial City can be intentional about their journey. We all may want to be more hospitable or more forgiving or prayerful or better at practicing soulful spending, but do we know how to do that on Monday? This program will help to teach us a way to live out the Christian virtues in our lives.

The virtues are organized in a trinity: the Journey Inward, the Journey Outward, the Journey Together. Each person and each parish will naturally gravitate toward one or two of these, but a whole life comes from embracing all of them.

The Journey Inward is our personal relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is the cultivation of our connection with God and includes many of the virtues we associate with spirituality. The Journey Outward is our service to our brothers and sisters in the world. This is our outreach to all of God's children. The Journey Together is the life of community. These virtues are what enable a community to flourish.

Many blessings to you on *your* journey,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Porter Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Right Reverend G. Porter Taylor, Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

## TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY

This program has been designed to serve as a guide for those choosing to cultivate virtues of Christian living in their everyday lives. Each virtue offers flexible resources, providing a variety of activities for individual and/or group use. You are encouraged to adapt and arrange the growth activities in ways that work best for you.

Each virtue will include the following components:

- a description of the virtue
- related biblical references
- historical context
- a theological framework
- a variety of growth activities for individual and group use
- prayers
- additional resources for further investigation

The growth process for cultivating a virtue involves three key phases that often will overlap or dovetail as we develop habitual patterns of thinking, choosing, acting, and reflecting:

- **Awareness:** The process of gaining and clarifying knowledge about a virtue.
- **Belief:** The process of exploring one's personal opinions, adapting them, and acquiring new perspectives of understanding for a given virtue.
- **Commitment:** The process of choosing a strategy or making a plan to test our understanding by putting the virtue into daily practice.

The Activities Section at the end of each virtue is designed to assist you with each of these three phases.

The educational dimension of the process emerges as participants reflect on the experiences of practicing the virtue. Often this will result in a new or expanded awareness and the cycle begins again at a deeper level. The more we practice and reflect upon our practice, the more likely that the virtue will become a habit. The deeper the habit, the more transparent we become in our service to others, and the love of God shines through us—rather than the reflection of our personal agendas—onto other people in the name of Christ.

## Tools for Navigating the Journey

It often takes a lot of slow to grow. As you work through these virtues, be patient with yourself and others. Lasting growth usually happens in smaller steps rather than by leaps and bounds. Also helpful is the support of a spiritual friend or group to whom you can be accountable with your commitment to the process of a healthy lifestyle change.

The time one commits to the exploration and practice of this material will be highly individual. One person may want to work on a portion of a particular virtue, and may choose to work on more of it at a later time. Another person may want to work completely through each of the virtues before going to another one. No matter what plan you choose, give yourself plenty of time with the material and the exercises. The goal is to grow faithfully in a daily practice rather than to complete a virtue or finish the entire program within any given time frame. Once a virtue is cultivated, we as disciples can never over-practice it along our Christian journey.

New virtues will be added periodically to this program. Keep this in a three-ring binder and add the new virtues as they become available.

### **For more information:**

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## GUIDELINES FOR **LISTENING**

1. Take time to become settled in God's presence.
2. Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, and rational faculties).
3. Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experience. Avoid being hypothetical.
4. Do not challenge what others say.
5. Do not interrupt.
6. Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.
7. Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.
8. Listen to the group as a whole, to those who have not spoken verbally as well as to those who have; generally, if you have already spoken, leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time.

\*From *Grounded in God: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations*, Suzanne G. Farnham, Stephanie A. Hull, R. Taylor McLean (Morehouse Publishing, 1996) pp. 55–56.