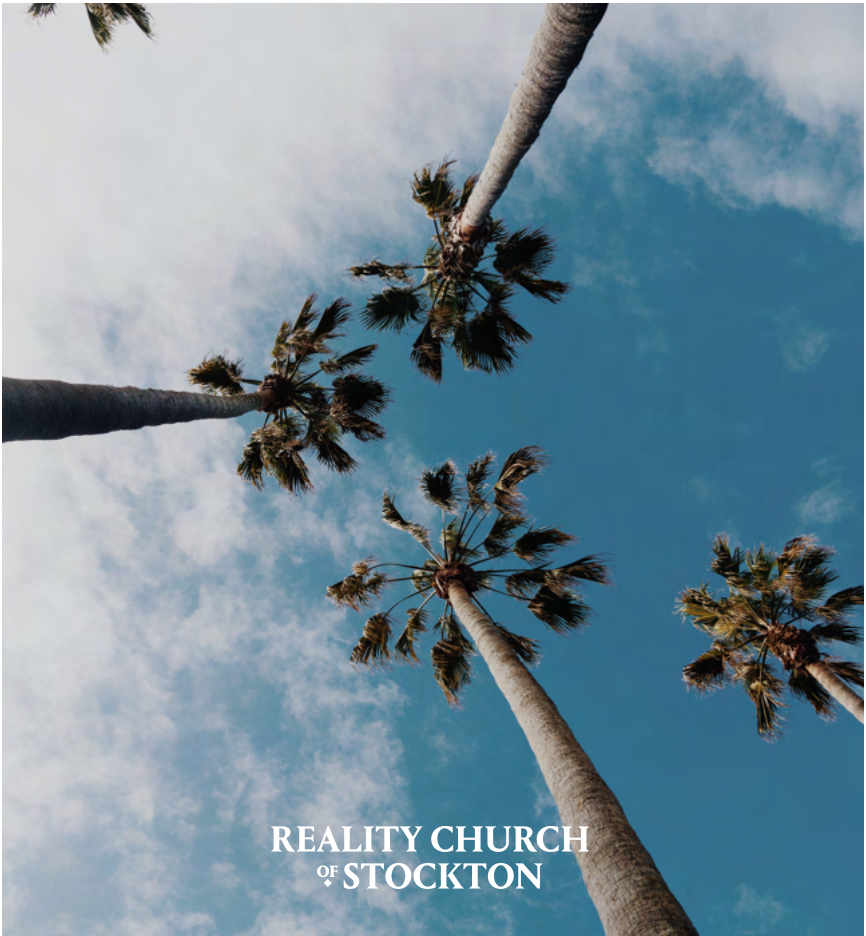


GUIDE FOR SPIRITUAL

FORMATION



REALITY CHURCH
OF STOCKTON

What is Spiritual Formation?

Spiritual formation seeks to apply what we believe to how we live in continuous reliance on the Holy Spirit. Through daily practices, we learn to embrace God's eternal promises.

It's about growing godly habits that weaken sinful impulses, and promote Christlike character. Who we are and what we become often are not shaped by the big, memorable moments, but rather through our regular rhythms.

This guide for spiritual formation is a tool to help you connect daily with the transformative grace of Jesus—who alone changes us. Our hope is that you will discover simple and lasting ways to participate in the life of Christ. Apply these practices for the sake of cultivating communion with God and delight in him, not burden or drudgery.

May you experience the kind of growth you most deeply desire.

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Habits of Daily Prayer

“But I call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.”

Psalm 55:16–18

God is inviting you into communion with him throughout your day. We want to offer some ways that you can incorporate prayer into your morning, midday, and evening.

Morning

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name;
your kingdom come;
your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

Allow each line of the Lord’s prayer to guide you into praise and petition. Here are a couple of examples of how this can be done:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name;”

Take this opportunity to thank God—that he is our father and that we are his children. Let this title, “Father in heaven”, ignite your confidence in his power and position over all creation. The King of all of Creation welcomes you to call upon him as Father. Contemplate the gravity of this invitation.

**“And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.”**

Take this opportunity to confess your sins to God, and experience his forgiveness and healing. Honestly acknowledge how you have sinned against God and others in thought, word, and deed; by what you have done, and by what you have left undone. Additionally, let this prayer bring to mind any relationships where you may be withholding forgiveness or harboring resentments. Voice these to God.

Midday

“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers.” 1 Thessalonians 1:2

Midday is an opportunity to turn outward to the lives of others around you in intercession. Intercessory prayer is a way of petitioning on behalf of others. Jesus is our advocate who compels us to also advocate for others. Take time to pray for their spiritual, relational, emotional, or practical needs.

Consider praying for the needs of:

- Friends, family members, coworkers, and neighbors
- The Church
- Your city, and the broader community
- The world

Evening

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Psalm 16:7–8

The Daily Examen is often practiced in the evening, as a prayerful reflection on your day. It allows you to discern God's presence, and your own responses. Take time to pay attention to God and what's going on within you.

Pay close attention to God.

Ask God to reveal to you where he has been at work throughout your day. Look for the evidence of his grace in the provisions you enjoyed, the conversations you engaged in, the strength of the Spirit you experienced, and the challenges you faced in faith and faithfulness.

Express your gratitude, needs, emotions, etc.

Pay close attention to yourself.

Acknowledge small signs of what's been going on beneath the surface with these questions: What occupied my mind today? What weighed heavy on my heart? What desires often came to the surface? Is there tension in my body? Is there any underlying anxiety I need to entrust to God? Do I need to resolve any conflicts?

This practice is an opportunity to redirect your heart at the end of the day. It's not too late to engage God, no matter how out of control or disorienting your day may have been.



Throughout the day

Take a moment to offer short prayers. Whether you are walking between classes, driving, making food, or some other task, use this opportunity to pray. “Jesus Prayers” are very short prayers of praise or petition, that can be said in a single breath.

A few examples:

Inhale:

“Lord Jesus Christ,”

Exhale:

“Have mercy.”

Inhale:

“Lord, I believe.”

Exhale:

“Help my unbelief.”



Praying the Psalms

The Psalms have directed God's people for countless generations: offering vocabulary for honest and vibrant prayer. There are Psalms for the many different circumstances we will face as individuals, and as a church. Here is a list of the various categories to engage:

Individual Psalms of Lament

3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42-43, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 89, 102, 109, 120, 130, 139, 141, 142, 143

Communal Psalms of Lament

12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129, 137

Psalms of Praise

8, 19, 33, 66, 100, 103, 104, 111, 113, 114, 117, 145-150

Psalms of Repentance

6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

Psalms of Thanksgiving

18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 65, 66, 67, 75, 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 136, 138

Royal Psalms

2, 18, 20, 21, 29, 45, 47, 72, 78, 89, 93, 95-99, 101, 110, 132, 144

Psalms of Trust

11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131

Imprecatory Psalms

7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139

Liturgical Psalms

15, 24, 50, 68, 81, 82, 115, 134

Psalms of Ascent

120-134

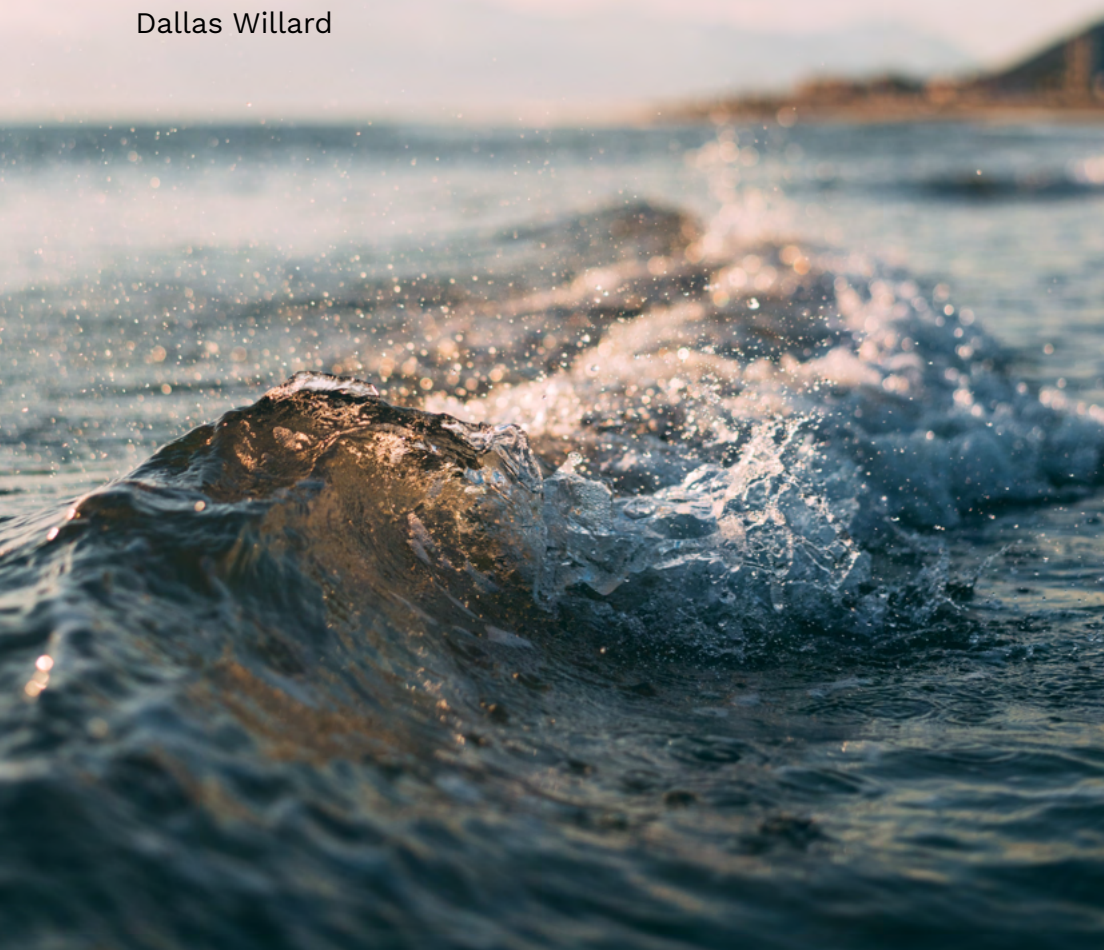
Wisdom Psalms

1, 19, 36, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, 128

“The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds. This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus ‘practicing the presence of God’ is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our ‘practicing’ we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God.

“But these are habits - not the law of gravity - and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings.”

Dallas Willard



Planning

Knowing where to start can be daunting. Consider choosing a reading plan:

- **Psalms and Gospels:** Read one Psalm, and one chapter of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) each day.
- **Old and New Testament Simultaneously:** Read a chapter from an OT book, and from a NT book each day.
- **End to End:** Start in Genesis and conclude with the book Revelation. (15-30 min a day)
- **Robert Murray M'Cheyne Reading Plan**



Practicing

One suggestion for your daily reading is practicing what is called **Lectio Divina** (“divine reading”) which is an ancient Christian practice that helps us read and live out the Scriptures.

This practice involves four steps:

Lectio: Reading the Scripture.

Meditatio: Meditating on what you’ve just read.

Oratio: Praying the Scriptures.

Comtemplatio: Contemplating life in light of the Scriptures.

When we give unhurried time to each step, we are not only taking in God’s Word, we are also learning to express it and live it out.

Some helpful questions to ponder through the process:

- What do I learn about God through this passage?
- What do I learn about myself through this passage?
- What do I want to say to God in light of this passage?
- What would life be like if I truly leaned into what this passage says?



Hearing

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ...” Romans 10:17

Some will find that they struggle to read Scripture and stay focused. In fact, most people will find it to be a challenge. This shouldn't discourage you from engaging the Bible or make you feel bad. This may be an opportunity to recognize that you are an auditory learner who benefits more from listening than reading.

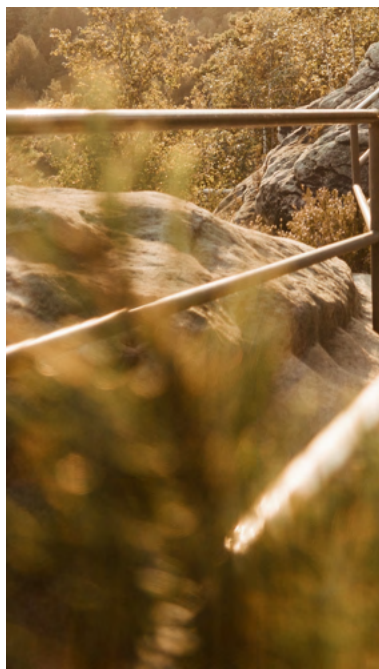
For countless generations, the story of God was passed down through spoken words. Only later in history was the message conveyed through written documents. Hearing God's Word welcomes us into the timeless practice of receiving God's Word from someone else and hearing God speak to us through the voice of another.

Consider downloading the Dwell app or some other resource that allows you to hear the Bible read to you. Find a reading plan that walks you through the various parts of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. You may even ask someone you know to read the Bible aloud with you.

Meditating

**“Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all
the day.”** Psalm 119:97

Reflect on the passages you read or heard throughout your day. This may mean focussing on one word, name, or idea that stands out to you. Dwell upon it. Consider the implications. Begin to envision your life in light of this meditation.



Learning Together

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.” Colossians 3:16

A vital part of growing in God's Word is learning in community. As we study God's Word in community, we grow in our own personal understanding through the unique work of the Holy Spirit in others.

We are also used by God to help others grow in the process. Join a small group that meets regularly to study and discuss God's Word. Or consider inviting someone to learn the scriptures with you in an informal setting, over coffee or food.





Rhythm of Weekly Practices



Sunday

Gather and Worship

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” Psalm 122:1

The Sunday gathering, where Christians traditionally come together for worship, is one of the most valuable gifts that God has given to his people.

It is also one of the most important times and places for Christian discipleship and spiritual formation.

The consistent, week-by-week habit of gathering for worship, teaching, fellowship, giving, serving, and the Lord’s Supper is a life-giving gift to prioritize over all other typical weekend activities.



Monday

Silence and Solitude

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. Psalm 131:1–2

The pace of your Monday will likely shape the rest of your week. Before your day becomes hurried, dominated

by schedules and task lists, begin in silence and solitude. Carve out a time and space at the very beginning of your day to allow God to have the first word over your day, and week. Let Jesus eliminate your hurried posture and determine your pace. Let his voice calm your soul.

“We begin the day in silence because God should have the first word. We end the day in silence because God should have the last word.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Tuesday

Generous Blessing

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. 2 Corinthians 9:11–12

Look for opportunities to serve and support those in need. (Examples: providing groceries, cooking for those working long hours, helping with bills for those out of work, buying someone lunch or a coffee, volunteer with a ministry or community organization.)

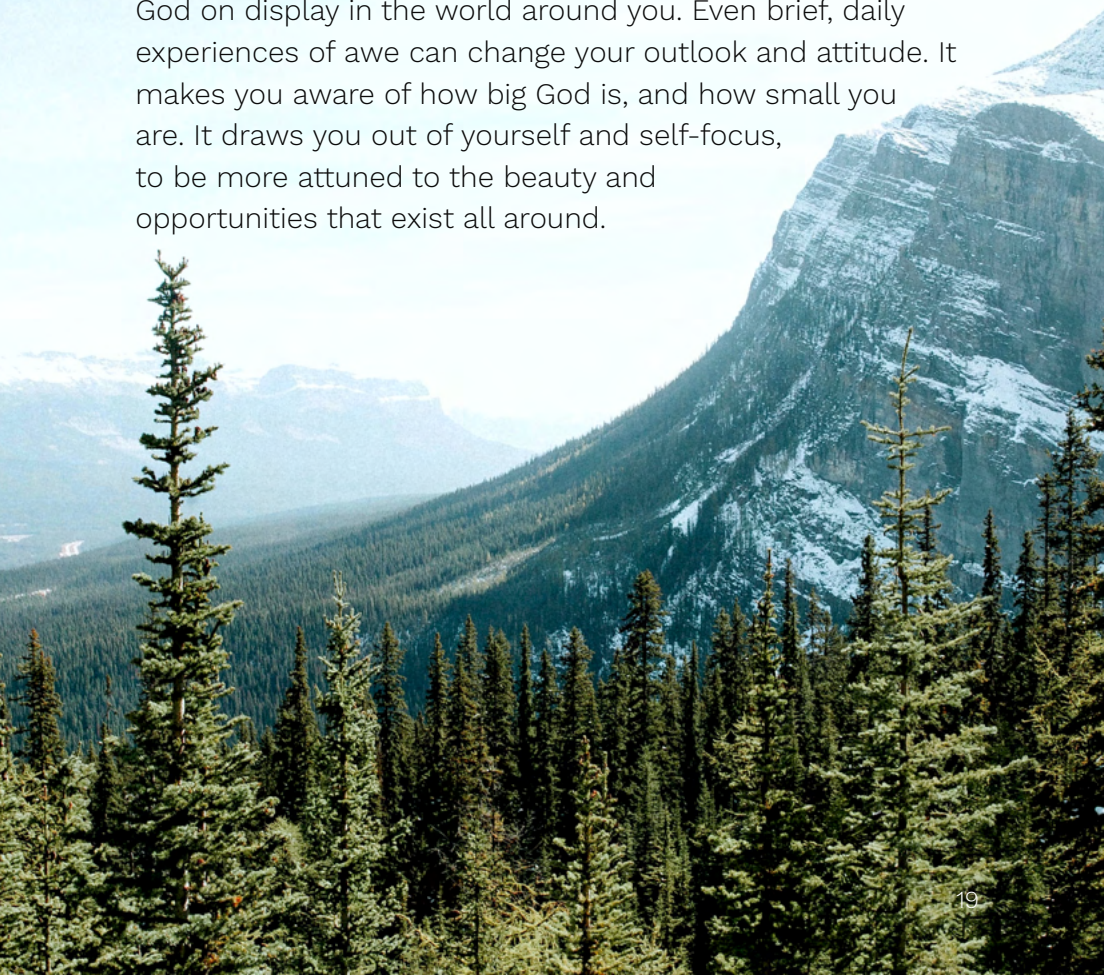
Pray specifically for the vulnerable and those in need in our community, our city, and our world. Also, pray for our deacons who care for the practical needs of the church.

Wednesday

Awe and Wonder

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. Psalm 63:2–3

The Bible describes the whole earth as being full of God's glory. Go outside and intentionally behold the majesty of God on display in the world around you. Even brief, daily experiences of awe can change your outlook and attitude. It makes you aware of how big God is, and how small you are. It draws you out of yourself and self-focus, to be more attuned to the beauty and opportunities that exist all around.





Thursday

Reaching Out

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

To another believer:

Reach out to someone within your church community for the sake of encouragement, accountability, and prayer. Let them know they matter to you and matter to God. Convey love and appreciation.

To someone who is unchurched/de-churched:

Reach out to someone outside of the Christian community for the sake of evangelizing, inviting to church, or offering some form of relational support in the name of Jesus.

Friday

Fasting

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5:6

Spiritual formation isn't theoretical or sentimental. It's practical. This is why fasting is so helpful. It brings the mind, heart, and body into alignment in devotion to Jesus.

“Fasting is an opportunity to lay down an appetite – an appetite for food, for media, for shopping. This act of self-denial may not seem huge – it's just a meal or a trip to the mall – that brings us face-to-face with the hunger at the core of our being. Fasting exposes how we try to keep empty hunger at bay and gain a sense of well-being by devouring creature comforts. Through self-denial, we begin to recognize what controls us.”

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

There are fasts that you may choose to engage in 24 hours:

- **Absolute Fast:** No food (so long as this does not pose an immediate health risk)
- **Solid Food Fast:** Fruits and vegetables only [Daniel Fast]
- **Partial Fast:** Cutting out meat, sugar, bread, or some other item
- **Alternative Fast:** Eliminating social media, entertainment, cosmetics, shopping, or some other luxury



Saturday

Rest (Sabbath) and Reflect

The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”

Mark 6:30-31a

Rest is built into the basic framework of life and flourishing. In the process of creating, God rested. God welcomes us into his rest. Sadly, we are often in such a frenzy that rest is expendable. Set aside a day without work, in order to honor your body’s need to rest and your soul’s need for refreshing in God. Reflect on your week. What can you celebrate? What should you grieve? Talk to God about these things. Write them down so that you can recall what God is doing later down the road.

“Sabbath is about withdrawal from the anxiety system of Pharaoh, the refusal to let one’s life be defined by production and consumption and the endless pursuit of private well-being...In our own contemporary context of the rat race of anxiety, the celebration of Sabbath is an act of both resistance and alternative. It is resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by production and consumption.”

Walter Brueggemann

