

Eternally Connected
Nourishment from Jesus for the World
A 6 Week Lenten Tour Through Traditional Spiritual Practices

Welcome to the Eternally Connected Track! This track will connect you with spiritual practices that followers of Jesus have used for centuries. A common temptation with these kind of practices is to do them in total isolation (they are often quiet and meditative). However, we will learn that throughout history, believers always practiced these things together. They were never meant to lead us into isolation (though this could happen for a time), but they were meant to bring us into a deeper and more authentic community. We encourage you to keep a journal through this process and to talk with your running partner about questions and struggles that have come up for you along the way. Also, please remember that these disciplines are not provided to test your faithfulness, but rather for you to experience afresh the faithfulness of God. This is not a measuring stick for your faith. Put bluntly, you are not on trial!! This is an invitation to vary your spiritual routine based on past Christian practices. The hope is that even if you don't enjoy each practice that you will learn through it and encounter God anew in it. There is always room for creativity and variation. We hope that through these practices you will learn new ways of experiencing God and that this will open your heart more and more to the world that God so loves.

Recommended books for this track are:

Blue Like Jazz

By: Donald Miller

http://www.amazon.com/Blue-Like-Jazz-Nonreligious-Spirituality/dp/0785263705/sr=1-1/qid=1172036395/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/102-9348870-6087309?ie=UTF8&s=books

Soul Feast

By: Marjorie J. Thompson

http://www.amazon.com/Soul-Feast-Invitation-Christian-Spiritual/dp/0664229476/sr=1-1/qid=1172036508/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/102-9348870-6087309?ie=UTF8&s=books

The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry

By: Henri J.M. Nouwen

http://www.amazon.com/Way-Heart-Spirituality-Contemporary-Ministry/dp/0060663308/sr=1-2/qid=1172036620/ref=pd_bbs_sr_2/102-9348870-6087309?ie=UTF8&s=books

Recommended Movies for this track are:

Bruce Almighty (2003)

The Mission (1986)

- Reflection: How do the characters encounter God and how does it change their everyday life and their existence in the world?

Recommended Activities for this track are:

- Keeping a journal
- Connecting how the internal life directly affects the external life
- Attend a compline service at St Marks Cathedral <http://www.saintmarks.org/Liturgy/worship.htm>

- Attend the Lenten morning communion services offered by UPC
<http://www.upc.org/worship.aspx?id=72#Lenten>

EACH WEEK:

(The following activity will take about an hour)

Reading. There will be a Scripture passage offered to you for a practice called *lectio divina*, which means “spiritual reading.” This is one way that Christians historically have read Scripture meditatively. The focus is not on getting the facts straight, or even understanding the word cognitively. The focus is instead on listening and letting the word strike you intuitively. You will not ask questions about what, why, or how. But instead the only question you will ask is: what word or phrase is resonating with my gut and what might God be saying to me through that word or phrase? The key to this kind of reading is time and patience. Very rarely will a word or phrase strike you the first time through the passage, or even the second. Often the passage must be read 3-5 times aloud before a word or phrase really starts to hit home. The trick is not to second guess the word or phrase from the beginning and then spend the whole time thinking “is this it?” The focus must instead be on abandoning your body, mind, and soul to Scripture for that time. Instead of reading Scripture, let Scripture read you! Submit yourself to it, and trust that the Holy Spirit is working in you and through the words. Then...

Journal. Once the word or phrase strikes you, consider why this might be the case. What is going on in your life right now and how does this word or phrase speak into that situation? How does this word or phrase frame certain events that have recently taken place in your life? Now is the time to journal. Explore these connections. What is God’s invitation to you through the word or phrase?

Re-reading. Now read the passage again. Your goal is to get it embedded within you. As you wake up and start a new day tomorrow, or finish the day today, you want these words to come easily to mind. By reading it again, you are allowing the word of Christ to dwell in you richly.

Prayer. Ask that God would seal these words in your heart. Ask that you might be able to recall them easily as the week goes on and you need strength and wisdom. Trust that God will work and release it to him.

Suggested Texts for Lectio Divina

- WEEK 1: PSALM 63
- WEEK 2: 1 KINGS 19:1-18
- WEEK 3: MATTHEW 4:1-11
- WEEK 4: MATTHEW 6:5-18
- WEEK 5: MARK 14:1-11
- WEEK 6: LUKE 23:26-43

OTHER DISCIPLINES OFFERED ALONG THE WAY

PLAN AHEAD: The following are various disciplines that can be used along with *lectio divina* to broaden your experience. One possibility is to try to include one discipline every week. However, if you choose the partial fast throughout the 6 weeks of Lent, it may be too much to include other disciplines as well. Or you might want to pick one other discipline and stick with it weekly the whole time. Think through your plan with your running partner. What is a realistic design for you? Be sure to communicate about what ever you decide, because you will need to talk to each other about the experience along the way.

FORMS OF PRAYER

A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening. – Soren Kierkegaard

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER: *This activity takes at least 30 minutes.* Find a comfortable place to pray. Light a candle, or come up with some other way of signifying that this is special time between you and God (listen to a certain song, etc.). Be mindful that God is present and give thanks for his presence – not for any specific purpose, just that he has promised to be and is with you. The idea behind this prayer is that we don't only pray that God might answer our prayers, but we also pray that we might BE with God and enjoy his presence. If there are other thoughts that come into your mind during this time (rest assured, thoughts will come!), don't worry, just acknowledge them, and let them move on. When you remember, return your mind to God's presence in your midst. Invite God to speak to you when you are ready. Reflect on what it is that God is saying to you.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER: *This activity takes at least 20-30 minutes.* Prepare yourself in the same way as the contemplative prayer. Invite God into your presence. As you pray for each person individually, imagine that you are physically bringing that person before the feet of Jesus. Lay that person down at the feet of Jesus. Then ask God to heal that person or act in their life in a specific way. Leave that person in the arms of Jesus.

FORMS OF FASTING

Fasting is important in the Christian experience because it deepens within the whole self a sense of one's dependence upon the grace of God. Fasting is more than an act of abstinence. It is an affirmative act; it is a way of waiting on God; it is an act of surrender. –James Earl Massey

12-24 HOUR FASTING: This activity must be practiced during a time when you will have some time and space to reflect. It is meant for setting aside time to focus on our dependence upon God. This is not a test, it is better to be realistic about what you can do. God can work through many kinds of fasting, this is just one option. Prepare your mind for the fast by having a few inspirational Scripture verses that you plan to go over throughout the time. Be sure to drink plenty of water (more than usual) throughout the entire fast. Use the time when you would be eating to reflect on your constant dependence on God. Break the fast with a light-ish meal, or you could get a stomachache! After you break the fast, reflect on how God worked in your during that time.

PARTIAL FASTING: This activity is more in line with the traditional “giving up” for Lent. The idea is to give up one thing for a limited amount of time. Creativity is the key here. Ideas range from bread to mirrors to certain forms of clothing to eating out to excess treats (like coffee and sweets) to meat to single occupied vehicles (could you take the bus for a week?). In giving up a luxury, we are acknowledging that we are not ruled by the abundance or material things in our lives, but we are ruled by God. This is a fast that could be practiced throughout Lent, or for another pre-determined amount of time. The key is to give up something that is not solely for your benefit – eg. Giving up chocolate to lose weight doesn't count. Giving up chocolate because it is your luxury offers the perspective needed. In giving something up, we identify more with others in the world and are more deeply connected with our need for God. Other options include taking something on. For example, you could fast from Friday nights out by committing to serve at a homeless shelter every Friday night for the next 6 weeks.

First Run

PSALM 63

Warm up

Once you have found each other at your pre-arranged place take 15 minutes each to give each other a little background. You can do this by giving each other:

- ❖ three or four “mile stone” markers in your life—places/events/decisions that have played a significant part in your story, or
- ❖ a handful of things you think would be helpful for someone to know you, or
- ❖ a significant person, place and event in your life for each five year period, or
- ❖ any other way you come up with that tells something of your story.

Then: why did you choose to have a running partner? What are you concerned about? Looking forward to?

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push/Challenge

What are one or two ways you can be praying for one another? If time and place allows pray together.

Cool Down

Decide when and where you want to meet next (you may want to set up the next five times now, too).

Decide what book(s) you are going to read (you do not have to read the same one) and you may also want to plan what practices you would like to do in the following weeks.

(Note: if there are weeks you need to meet by phone you can do the practices on your own and then do the warm up, push/challenge and cool downs over the phone and talk about any discoveries you made from the practices that week.)

Second Run

1 KINGS 19:1-18

Warm up

Where did you go as a kid to be alone?

What is something that caught your attention or imagination in the book you selected for this track?

If you did not have enough time last time for both of your stories take time this week.

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push/Challenge

- In this passage Elijah was exhausted and overwhelmed. Before God spoke with him God made sure Elijah was rested and fed. Is there something you need to do similarly? More hours of sleep/ more nutritious meals?
- What are two ways can you be praying for each other?

Cool Down

- Decide what you want to do next week if it you haven't already.
- Consider going to the Compline service at St. Mark's Cathedral.

Third Run

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Warm up

- What's been on your front burner this week (where does your mind and heart tend to track to)?
- Check in on your prayer concerns from last week.
- What is something that caught your attention or imagination in the book you selected for this track?

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push/Challenge

In this passage Jesus was tempted to deny who he was, beloved of God, when he was hungry and alone.

1. In what circumstances do you find yourself most tempted to question God's sufficiency for your life and find your identity elsewhere (e.g. for some the temptation of being filled by pornography is greatest when tired or feeling slighted or you may find the temptation to gossip and tear others down coincides with times low blood sugar)?
2. What steps can you take to make yourself less vulnerable in these situations?

Cool Down

Make plans to watch one of the movies recommended for the track (either together or on your own).

Decide whether you want to do the next study in advance and come talk about it or do it together. Pray about how God would work through you to make Easter significant for people around you and the Union community.

Run Four

MATTHEW 6:5-18

Warm Up

What's is something that has been an encouragement to you in the last couple of weeks? Or, What is something you are thankful for that has occurred recently?

Check in on your prayer concerns from last week.

What is something that caught your attention or imagination in the book or movie you selected?

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push/Challenge

Consider some kind of fast for a day or two or even a week. It may be from media, a game, certain foods, shopping—remember this is not about being religious but creating awareness of God—that He is with us, sufficient and about adding to life: freeing space in our lives to enjoy his presence and to partner with him in his work of reconciliation by blessing and loving others.

Cool Down

- What are two ways can you be praying for each other? For Union?
- Decide on a movie to discuss next time.

Run Five

MARK 14:1-11

Warm up

What is one your dreams for the next five years?

What is something that has been difficult since you last met?

What are some thoughts/feelings about the movie you saw?

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push/Challenge

In this passage Jesus accepts a lavish gift. What does it mean for you to receive the lavish gift of God's acceptance and grace for you this week? Is there something you need to accept and embrace? Is there a risk you can take to serve someone else knowing you are loved by the God of the Universe?

Cool Down

How can you pray for one another?

Agree on things to pray about for the Union community.

Run Six

LUKE 23:26-43

Warm Up

What has been good about these six weeks? What has been challenging?
What's a hope you have for the Union community?

Run

Move into a time of Lectio Divina as described earlier (reading a few times, journal, re-reading, prayer) and/or another practice.

Push or Challenge

1. Identify a practice or a discovery from these last six weeks that has been significant for you.
2. Then, come up with a way to keep this before you or a part of your life for the next 40 days.
3. Go to the Running Partners blog on the Union web page and share some of your thoughts about your last six weeks of training.

Cool Down

Drawing upon what you have seen in your time together “bless” your running partner. It may be a word of thanks, encouragement, affirmation of a gift or talent you see in them.

Consider asking someone who has not had a running partner to join you on another track.