

Growing spiritually

What hinders spiritual growth?

- unforgiveness (Matthew 6.14-15)
- persistent sin (Psalm 66.18)
- the devil (1 Peter 5.8)
- distractions, anxieties, good deeds (Luke 10.38-42 - listen to Dan's sermon from 4th Feb)
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Everyone is unique!

Bear in mind:

- what works for you won't suit someone else, and vice versa
- different things work at different stages in our lives – depending on health, work, family, age etc
- just as everyone has their own character (their default way of relating to others), so everyone has their own 'spiritual temperament' (their default way of relating to God). See Gary Thomas *Sacred Pathways* for more on your spiritual temperament, or take a quiz at <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/growing-together-spiritually/differing-faith-expressions/your-spiritual-temperament-quiz>
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Some ideas to try

1. Work through the **Spiritual healthcheck** book (£2.50) by Carl Laferton – available at church
2. Develop a **Rule of Life** with the diocese or go to a Rule of Life workshop – see www.winchester.anglican.org/rule-of-life for more information. A Rule of Life is a way of reflecting on your life and living intentionally for God – it's not about following a set of rules!
3. Buy a book of prayers such as **Prayers to start my day** by David O'Malley – to help you reflect prayerfully as you start each day. Different people will find different approaches to prayer helpful! Ask if you're not sure what to try.
4. Make sure you're **engaging with the Bible**. If you're struggling with that, try a different set of Bible reading notes, or use the Bible in one Year app on your phone or tablet, or listen to an Audio Bible in the car, or listen to a podcast from a church with strong Bible teaching, or ... or ... or ... Again, different people will find different approaches to the Bible helpful. Ask if you're not sure what to try.
5. Go on a **Hopeweavers** day (www.hopeweavers.co.uk) or one of our church **quiet days**.

6. **Spiritual disciplines** are activities that can help us gain power to live life as Jesus taught and modelled it. There's no definitive list of what is or isn't a spiritual discipline – but they are ways that Christians down the ages have found helping for spiritual growth.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourselves to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. (1 Timothy 4:7-8)

Using the spiritual disciplines:

- Don't turn the disciplines into law
- Remember to focus on Christ, not the disciplines
- Don't isolate or elevate one of the disciplines above the others
- Don't just study the disciplines; try them out!
- Don't get downhearted in the troughs – try something else.
- The disciplines are about *training* to make us spiritually healthy; not *trying* to please God. To put it another way, they're about faith, not works
- Don't worry too much about technique; concentrate on the wisdom the disciplines contain

Richard Foster identifies how different branches of the church have typically emphasised some disciplines at the expense of others – yet all are useful for our Christian growth. Here's some suggestions from 6 church traditions:

Practising the Prayer-Filled Life: The Contemplative Tradition

1. Set aside an hour that will be free from distraction. Use the time for solitude, prayer, and meditation on the Bible.
2. Write out a prayer. Write it as a letter to God, expressing how you feel.
3. Take a walk. Consider the majesty of the world, giving thanks and praise for all of God's creation.
4. Meditate on a verse of Scripture. Note the words in the verse. Does anything stand out? Turn the verse into a prayer.
5. Hold people and situations before God in prayer. Take 10 minutes a day to bring your friends and loved ones before God. Do not worry about words; simply imagine Jesus standing beside them before the throne of grace.
6. Take a "prayer walk". Choose crowded streets where you can bless many passers-by with prayer, or go to a park or woods where you can discover that the earth and everything in it is the Lord's.

Practising the Virtuous Life: The Holiness Tradition

1. Try a 24 hour fast to discipline your appetite. Use the time you save by not eating to read your Bible. (N.B. Ensure you have no medical reasons for not fasting)

2. Resolve to face particular temptations that you struggle with. Find someone to help. Bring the temptation to God in prayer.
3. Fast from the TV for a week. Use the time you gain to try some other spiritual discipline or simply to enjoy your family / friends.
4. Be a “gossip-buster”.
5. Speak positively. Make two positive remarks about someone or something for every negative remark you make.
6. Do a “covet” check on your life. The Tenth Commandment tells us not to covet our neighbour’s possessions. Make a “wish list” of all the things you would like to have and then destroy the list while asking God to help you let go of your desire to possess. Finally, offer a prayer of thanks for all you have.
7. Keep the Sabbath - God’s gift to a frazzled world. Refuse to do any work – even the catch-up housework that presses you. Resist the guilt and simply rest in God. Allow yourself permission to do nothing, absolutely nothing.

Practising the Spirit-Empowered Life: The Charismatic Tradition

1. Discover your spiritual gifts.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s work in your life, and for the ability to keep in step with Him.
3. Allow the Holy Spirit to become a part of your prayer life. When you are praying this week, ask the Spirit to intercede when you cannot find words to express your concerns and your joys.
4. Welcome the illuminating work of the Spirit. One of the Spirit’s roles is to make the words of the bible come to life. When reading the Scriptures this week, open your mind to the “divine interpreter”.
5. Put on your armour. As Christians, we are given divine equipment called “the armour of God” (Ephesians 6¹⁰⁻¹⁷). Learn what it means to put on the whole armour of God.
6. Exercise your spiritual gifts in the life of the church.
7. Pray for the Spirit to give you confidence in the promises of God in Christ. Begin by reading Romans 8. The Holy Spirit is able to verify your position as a child of God the Father. Let the Spirit teach you how to pray to God as his child, saying “Abba, Father”, and give you a life of confidence before God.

Practising the Compassionate Life: The Social Justice Tradition

1. Write a supportive letter this week to someone you feel may be needing a word of encouragement.
2. Spend some time working at a shelter or a soup kitchen.
3. Donate blood. Find out where blood donation takes place locally and book an appointment.
4. Recycle.
5. Write to your MP and share your views. Is there an issue that you feel strongly about? Be sure that you have the facts straight and are expressing genuine Christian concern, not just prejudice.
6. Practise the service of hiddenness. Do a kind deed without being asked or expecting recognition.
7. Serve others by letting others serve you. Are you guilty of not letting other people do things for you? Hold a door? Buy a cup of coffee? Make a photocopy? It is a gift to others to let them serve you; do not deny them this joy.

Practising the Word-Centred Life: The Evangelical Tradition

1. Read the Bible for 15 minutes a day. Choose a method of reading (e.g. tackling a chapter or a section a day) and follow it. Use Bible study notes, if helpful. Let the Bible influence the course of each day.
2. Read a chapter of the Bible before falling asleep.
3. Meditate on a psalm once a day. The psalms are wonderful prayers that help us commune with God. Let the words of the psalms be your words. Read them slowly, over and over, until they become your prayers.
4. Memorise a verse or passage of Scripture. Recite it to your small group.
5. Delve deeply into the Bible using study notes or a commentary.

Practising the Sacramental Life: The Incarnational Tradition

1. Attend a Communion service. Receive the bread and wine joyfully, knowing that Jesus Christ is with you and longs to strengthen and teach you daily.
2. Remove the barrier that keeps God outside. Imagine that you are wearing full body armour that keeps God's spirit out of the innermost parts of your being. Remove it, invite God in, and wait until you feel that the work is complete, giving thanks at the end.
3. Do something creative – paint, sculpt, write a poem. Find out how Christians have expressed their faith through the creative arts.
4. Bring the presence of God to the ill. Visit someone in hospital or a nursing home.
5. Bring God into your workplace by asking him to help you solve problems. This communication does not have to be formal; quick, silent prayers spoken before or during a telephone conversation or meeting are heard by God too.
6. Invite God to your mealtimes. For one week, make a special effort to be aware of the presence of the risen Lord during your mealtimes with other people. Open meals with prayer.

Further Reading

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water* [on the six church traditions – see also www.renovarelife.org]

Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring your spiritual passion*

John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*

Ken Shigematsu, *God in my everything: how ancient rhythms help busy people enjoy God*

Ian Stackhouse, *The day is yours: slow spirituality in a fast-moving world*

Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

And finally ...

Spiritual growth isn't something we do by ourselves – it's something God wants to give to us. So whatever you do or try, don't do it in your own strength. Pray about it!

May God himself, the God of peace,
sanctify me through and through.

May my whole spirit, soul and body

be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls me is faithful

and he will do it. Amen.

(from 1 Thessalonians 5.23-24)