

INWARD WORK FOR OUTWARD LIVING

2023

# Lenten Devotions

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THE PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK

# Introduction

MAY GOD BLESS  
YOU AND KEEP YOU  
ON YOUR LENTEN  
JOURNEY.



Meditation, contemplation, centering prayer or examen can all feel like a waste of time — especially when our to-do lists are long and productivity is king.

But we shouldn't devalue the beneficial interior work these spiritual practices promote. Lent presents us with an opportunity to slow and listen for the still small voice of God.

At the college where I served as chaplain, I learned students were interested in mindfulness. Although I'd only dabbled with mindfulness meditation, as I have with many spiritual practices, there was no one else to help me meet this student need. So I decided to give it a try, starting a meditation group on Friday afternoons.

At first it was slow going. Few students came and I didn't really know what I was doing. Sitting together in silent meditation was more awkward than helpful. Growing frustrated, I told myself I needed to do better by my students. So I dug in and dedicated myself to the group. I read some books, reviewed online resources and began meditating every morning on my own.

As I practiced meditating, I began to learn about myself. Sitting in silence, focused on my breath, I could note my stressors: where I held them tightly in my body and, eventually, what triggered them. I discovered I could free myself from some of the tension of stress through breathing exercises. I grew to love praying without words, centering an image of God in my mind, visualizing myself soaking in the warmth of God's love like sunbeams breaking through the clouds of a brilliantly blue sky.

The most fascinating part of my personal practice was how it transformed the Friday afternoon group. More and more students were drawn to sit with me for prayer and meditation. There was a clear connection between my interior spiritual work and the way my students were attracted to what I offered. The more internal, spiritual work I did, the more I grew in awareness about who I am and who God is with me, the better I lived outwardly in mission and ministry.

In his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Richard J. Foster writes that the Latin examen refers to a weight on a balance scale, conveying the idea of an accurate assessment of a situation. This accurate assessment is the heart of Ignatius of Loyola's five-step daily prayer of examen one practices to honestly reflect on your day before God.

These daily Lent devotions will combine the practices of examen – honest assessment and reflection – with meditation, visualization and short prayers. The prayers can be used as mantras or breath prayers: breathe in praying the first phrase, breathe out praying the last. Through this interior work, I pray you also notice the benefits in your outward life — how you carry yourself, how you interact with others, how you can remain soft and still in a chaotic and hard world.

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