

# Spiritual Exercises

A spiritual discipline is, when practices faithfully and regularly, a habit or regular pattern in your life that repeatedly brings you back to God and opens you up to what God is saying to you.

– Spirithome, For more information, see [www.seasonspirit.com](http://www.seasonspirit.com)  
And click on Links, LE2008, February 10, A

## PRAYER

Prayer is the cornerstone of spiritual practices; it is the conversation of the heart with God. Prayer listens and speaks. Prayer is about what truly matters in life. Prayer is not what we think God wants us to say or what God wants us to think. Prayer may be in solitude or in community. Prayer may include praise, confession, intercession for others, thanksgiving, or simply acknowledging our feelings.

## Devotional Bible Reading

Some Bible reading is done to gather information. Devotional Bible reading moves us deeper than the “facts” or the “plot”. It listens for how this story speaks to us as individuals and as a community. Lectio divina (holy reading) is one form of reading the Bible in this way. It explores the scriptures using meditation and prayer. Individual time with the Bible is important, as is time spent in community with others. Again, the point is not information; the point is formation.

## Quiet time/Meditation

Quiet meditation is the listening side of prayer. Quietness is important, both quietness from noise around us and quietness from the noise that sometimes comes from within us. Quiet meditation, like prayer, may be done alone or with others. It may focus on a single verse of scripture or word. It may focus on a piece of music that brings our spirits into awareness of God’s presence. It may have to do with an experience in creation, reflecting on how God speaks to us through the things of nature (“silent parables”).

## Fasting

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all speak of fasting. Fasting reminds us in a very physical way that “we do not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4). Physical hunger stirs thoughts of spiritual hunger. It is also possible to fast from other things than food – movies with violence, the purchase of luxury items, the use of one’s car. (Please note that fasting from food may affect medications and medical conditions.)

## Doing good things

Bible study, prayer and other spiritual practices can help you search yourself so the Spirit can reveal what you’re still holding back from God, or holding against other people. You can turn away from specific instances of unkindness, ask for forgiveness, and even try to repay with kindnesses and an open heart. All that is good, but I know for myself that it’s not enough. I need to do more than wear a funny smile. I need to do something with it – loving others in some way that will actually do them some good. Love then becomes more than warm fuzzy feelings.

## a simple aid to prayer

1. Your thumb is nearest to you. So begin your prayers by praying for those closest to you. They are the easiest to remember. To pray for our loved ones is, a C. S. Lewis once said, a “sweet duty.”
2. The next finger is the pointing finger. Pray for those who teach, instruct and heal. This includes teachers, doctors, and ministers. They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.
3. The next finger is the tallest finger. It reminds us of our leaders. Pray for the head of government, leaders in business and industry, and administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God’s guidance to bring justice, peace and respect for the environment, to our hurting world.
4. The fourth finger is our ring finger. Surprising to many is the fact that this is our weakest finger, as any piano teacher will testify. It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain, especially those who are victims of social injustice.
5. And lastly comes our little finger; the smallest finger of all which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others. As the Bible says, “The least shall be the greatest among you.” Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively.

