

STAY AWAKE WHY PRACTICE?

PRACTICE MAKES
PERMANENT

WEEKEND!

STEVE MATTHEWS

PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT



My long-time friend Todd has always been a hard worker. He found success in two endeavors he truly enjoys—building homes and playing golf. With a knack for solving construction challenges, Todd got a lot of practice at building things. He worked as a contractor on over 50 homes, learning new skills and gaining confidence with each completed project. Todd also practiced long hours to be a good golfer, winning several amateur tournaments over the course of his life. Even in his 80s, Todd was impressing golfers half his age.



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I have read that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to master a skill. What are you practicing these days? Perhaps you are a math wiz, a dancer, a photographer, or an aspiring basketball star. What matters enough for you to put in the hours it takes to master something?

As Christians we need spiritual “disciplines,” practices that help us attune ourselves to God and to God’s invitations. Common spiritual practices include prayer, Bible study, spiritual reading, journaling, fasting, and worship. Some people pair these practices with other activities they enjoy. A friend of mine used to run six miles every morning as a spiritual practice. As he ran, he prayed for his friends, family, church, and community. Running and praying readied him for the day ahead.

Practice makes permanent. It’s a catchy title, but it’s also true. Neuropsychologists and others who study brain chemistry phrase it this way: “Neurons that fire together, wire together.” Our practices really do change our brains and the way we interact with the world.

Our practices can improve our skill level; they can change our attitudes as well. Do we want to practice seeing scarcity, or do we want to practice being grateful? Do we want to practice being critical or being kind? If practice makes permanent, then what behaviors and attitudes do we want to cultivate?

Romans 12:2 invites us to reconsider the ways we think and act. Paul encourages us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (NRSV). How might our practices renew our minds so that we can experience God in new and deeper ways? <

Steve Matthews was a youth minister for over 15 years. He is now a consultant and coach working with new church starts and redeveloping communities of faith. He is also a spiritual director.

19 NEXT DAY STRETCH

My friend Todd no longer builds houses or plays golf. These days walking is a challenge for him. Yet even now, Todd is practicing new behaviors and attitudes. He is learning to paint; he is also practicing patience and an increased sense of gratitude for the kind, helpful people in his life. What about you? What do you want to practice? Maybe you would like to hone a particular skill. Perhaps you feel drawn to a new spiritual practice, or you want to cultivate a new attitude. Remember, it might take 10,000 hours—but practice does make permanent!

STAY AWAKE WHY PRACTICE?

LENTEN PRACTICES

WEEKEND!

CRAIG MITCHELL

walk on

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Do you remember learning to walk? I doubt it. Believe me, you tried. And you fell flat on your face. Ouch! Then you tried again.

Imagine having to learn to walk *again*. It's hard work! After a few days in the hospital for a knee replacement, I'm at home learning how to use my legs. Like a toddler, I don't have real control of my muscles. *Ouch!* So it's back to basics. Bend and stretch. Fail and try again. I have a daily exercise regimen and a demanding physiotherapist who pushes me—apparently for my own good.

To be a disciple is to learn to walk with Jesus—to walk *like* Jesus—to follow wherever he might lead, to pay attention to what he says and does, to begin to imitate his moves—his compassion, his challenge, his forgiveness, his strength.

In the Gospels we see an unlikely group of people learn to follow Jesus. They spend three years learning to walk a new way. Though they start with baby steps, they often don't understand. Jesus' lessons stretch them and even hurt at times. Yet falling and trying again, they discover new muscles of faith, wisdom, and mercy.

The word *disciple* means "apprentice," one who learns to copy the Master. As disciples of Christ, we seek to put shoes in his footprints, to remember his wise words, to mirror his acts of blessing. To be a disciple is to be someone who walks with the Teacher—sometimes beside, sometimes behind, and at times sent on ahead with a task.



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Disciples need *discipline*, daily practice in learning how to walk. Bend and stretch. Watch and wait. Listen and learn. Seek and serve.

Lent is a time of discipline. For six weeks we follow the path of Jesus to the Cross, remembering that his disciples did the same. The path of Jesus

is uncomfortable for us in many ways. He takes us to places we would rather not go. He introduces us to people we would rather not meet. Along this path, we spend time exercising our minds, hearts, and bodies.

How might you learn to walk in the Way of Jesus during Lent? What practices might stretch your attention

to his words, his character, his purpose? How might you put your feet into his footprints, even as stumbling baby steps? <

Craig Mitchell is a writer, educator, and former youth minister from South Australia. He looks forward to being able to ride a bicycle again soon!

10 NEXT DAY STRETCH

Here are some ways to exercise your heart, mind, soul, and body during Lent. To learn to walk in the Way of Jesus, try one or more of these spiritual disciplines each week, every few days, or even daily.

- 1. Slow down.** Take five minutes each day to sit, breathe deeply, and be calm. You might use the Centering Prayer app to guide you through a time of silent prayer (<https://itunes.apple.com/app/centering-prayer/id844280857>).
- 2. Notice.** Find a visual sign of God's presence in your day. Take a photo on your phone.
- 3. Listen.** Try *lectio divina*. Meditate on a Bible passage; listen for God's voice in the text.
- 4. Pay attention.** Focus on your feet and where they take you each day. Stop sometimes, and say a prayer about what is around you.
- 5. Be present.** Find time to unplug and to be with and listen to your family and friends.
- 6. Create.** Make something as an act of prayer. You might knit, play music, sculpt, or build.
- 7. Volunteer.** Find a local service opportunity to engage in each week.
- 8. Reflect.** Practice the Prayer of Examen each day. The Examine app can help you review the highs and lows and learn from your day (<https://itunes.apple.com/app/examine/id545293684>).
- 9. Write.** Start a daily journal about your thoughts and feelings during Lent.
- 10. Talk.** Find a conversation partner to meet with during Lent. Talk and pray together about your faith journeys.