

To my Beloved KOG family,

My name is Austin Buckius and I am a student at Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque IA. I have grown up in KOG and you have all had an impact on me and my discernment. I have been asked in this time of social distancing to close the distance a bit and write a little blurb on spiritual practices.

Spiritual practices are in essence how we work on being closer to God. How we work on strengthening our spirituality and our connection with the true God as well as our family in Christ. Right now is the perfect time to do both, with the season of lent reflecting and repenting on our sins as well as in these times of uncertainty. Spiritual practices themselves are as varied as the people who fill the pews in churches the world over. The practices I am going to focus on however are my own, broken down into prayer, reflection, community, and meditation.

Let's start with prayer as I'm guessing this is one we're all familiar with. I have a few different practices associated with Prayer the most basic talking to God. When I say this though I mean literally talking to God. It's a lot easier to sit there and vent or celebrate with your oldest and dearest friend than it is to talk to the sky in a very formal setting. It also helps to strengthen my personal relationship with God. This is effectively me just telling God about my day and what's going on and how I'm feeling. The one downside is if you're talking out loud in public you may get some looks but otherwise, it's a good way to connect with God at any time of day.

Now A little more traditional is I try to pray Luther's morning and evening prayer daily, Some days with more success than not. You can easily find this in the [small catechism](#). (the little book they had you read for confirmation.) Though It gives specific instructions for how to do the prayer I like to mix it up a bit. I can't sing well, so I will often play my favorite hymn on my phone where It suggests singing in the morning and I like to incorporate the morning prayer while I'm getting ready for the day. Mostly because I try to use the water in my morning routine, shower, sink before I brushing my teeth to give a physical reminder of my baptism. And personally, when I remember I am a baptized and claimed child of God it helps me live in the grace of Christ a little more each day. The evening prayer I do pretty by the book but there is no reason you can't make it work for you.

Now reflection, I'm trying a new spiritual practice with this for lent. And to start this may make some folks uncomfortable because It's talking about death. I only urge you to remember that our God is a God of the hopeless and the hopeful and a God of death and life. I have embarked on a 40-day journey with the help of a [devotional written by a Catholic nun](#), I have been reflecting on my mortality and what it means to die. But more importantly, I have been reflecting on what Christ's sacrifice on the cross means for every person dead in sin. Through this reflection, I have more appreciative of what not only Lent but also what is waiting for us on Good Friday and the celebration that is easter. Especially now in this time of uncertainty with the virus, I have found comfort in knowing that though my death is waiting for me up the road I have eternal life in Christ.

Community is a tough one right now. After all, we're supposed to be practicing social distance, and self-quarantine. However, it is now just as important if not more important to focus on the community, we just need to get creative with how we live in the community and keep it Christ-centered. Today as I write this is St. Patricks day. A professor of mine who plays the bagpipes walked from the Castle. (Side note, how cool is it that I attend school in a castle.)

Down into the student housing and played the Irish set. Everyone was out on our porches listening and it brought a little life back into the community. Another professor set up a Facebook group where we can share stories of our stories of quarantine in six words. There are challenges. The church I attend up here is trying to figure out how to do a mobile food pantry or even if we should during the crisis and what would best serve our siblings in the community without food. But the point of this practice more so than socializing or trying to do good it to focus on community and how we relate to it. More importantly how we relate to the community through Christ. Whether that be balancing health concerns with service work or choosing not to go out. It's about looking towards your neighbor first and trying to meet their need to the best of your ability. Even if that need is to only hear some music from their porch.

Lastly is meditation. Now I'm not talking about sitting in a room trying to quite your mind unless that works for you. I am not able to do that. I constantly have to be moving or doing something, and mediating is not an easy task for me. However, I try to be crafty. I do leatherwork as a hobby and find that's where I connect with God the most. I'm working with my hands and focusing on making something. My mind quiets and I can listen to the still small voice of the spirit. I can't tell you how much of my discernment has happened while working with a piece of leather. I find out of all my practices that when I'm slacking on this one I suffer the most as well. It's the time where instead of talking to God I am listening for God's voice. So meditation does not just need to be sitting quietly in a room, I have found folks who find the same experience with hiking, fishing or other sports as well as cooking. The point is to find that time where you can slow down and listen to what God has to say to you.

There are many, many more practices and I encourage you to find what works for you. The important thing is that these practices help you connect with God and your own spirituality. There are numerous ways to do this and the ones stated above may not work for you just as some may not work for me. Google, use a podcast, talk to your Deacon, Pastor, friends, and family about what they do. Maybe use this as a way to reach out to the community over the phone or through Facebook and discuss spiritual practices. Feel free to reach out to me as well. I will include my personal info at the bottom as well. Just add KOG in front of the subject. Whatever works for you I hope you will take this time to strengthen your spiritual practices and that as we look towards the death and burial of our Lord and more importantly to His resurrection and bring of new life that your lent is blessed.

Peace,
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