

Making a Personal Spiritual Plan: 7 Initial Steps to Becoming Your True Self

Introduction: The purpose of human life is to know, love, and serve God so that we can be happy with Him forever in the next life. He's designed us to become the version of ourselves that can accomplish this. That version is what we call a "saint." A saint is simply the real you. It's your true self, minus woundedness and evil. We become saints by actually *living* our faith. The Living the Faith Series and this Personal Spiritual Plan (PSP) aid are designed to help us do this concretely in the world.

1. Daily Prayer

Why do we need it? When we set aside intentional time each day to converse with God, we start to know Him as He truly is—the most perfect Father imaginable. The very purpose of our human life is to know Him in this way, so that we can learn to love Him and serve Him as He has loved and served us. Prioritizing time each day to speak with Him is essential for the success of our entire spiritual life.

How should we do it?

- Set your daily prayer period at a time when you won't be disturbed. For most people, this is in the morning (perhaps before others in the house get up).
- Turn your phone on silent (not vibrate) and put it face down while you pray. If you use your phone to pray, make sure all notifications are turned off.
- Know the prayer options and how you personally like to pray before beginning your prayer time. Refer to Living the Faith Level II, Session VI to learn more on how to pray anywhere, any time.

Action Item:

- **Establish when, where, and for how long you will pray daily.**
 - Ex. I will pray everyday at 7:45 a.m. in my chair in my den for 15 minutes.

2. Weekly Mass

Why do we need it? The Mass is the most important thing that happens anywhere. It is a mystical and actual participation in the offering of the Son to the Father for the salvation of the world. We need the Mass because we need a concrete way to receive the antidote to eternal death. The Eucharist is this antidote. It is the unbloody, crucified, and resurrected flesh of Jesus Christ. It is not a symbol pointing us to Christ. It is Christ Himself manifested bodily amongst us. When we receive Him worthily, He conquers sin and death within us and we move one step closer to being with Him forever in Heaven.

How can we get the most out of it?

- Study the Mass. Know what the Mass is and what it is designed to do to you and for you. Refer to Fr. Furlow's "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass" document.
- Practice offering your entire self and the circumstances of your life to God in union with the sacrifice of the Cross in your daily prayer time. This will help you better make the offering during the Consecration at Mass.
- Make it a point to get to know 3–4 people within the parish after Mass in the parish hall. These are the types of people you would want to spend time with any day of the week.

Action Items:

- **Which parish will become your spiritual family? At what time will you attend weekly Mass there? How can you concretely engage that community?**
 - Ex. I will attend the 10 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Portland, OR every week I am not sick or out of town. I will spend at least 30 minutes after Mass grabbing a coffee and

getting to know some people in the parish hall. I will volunteer to help with coffee & donuts when I am able.

3. Monthly Confession

Why do we need it? To bring the evil things we have done to the Sacrament of Penance is to say to God: “You are divine, and I am not.” It is a position of total humility. We do this so that we can enter a space in which Jesus can cleanse and heal us. Sin causes damage to our minds, hearts, bodies, souls, and spirits. Not as arbitrary punishment, but as a necessary consequence of rejecting Him who is life and health and power itself. If we do not give Him the opportunity to heal us after we have fallen away, then the accumulated damage of our sin causes us to spiritually die and we are not able to live a holy life or stand firm on the path to Heaven.

How do we incorporate it in our lives?

- Before you go to bed, do a nightly examination of conscience. Review your day in terms of how you participated in one of the 7 Deadly Sins and write these infractions down in a locked note in your phone or some other private place. Bring this list to each confession.
- Memorize the 7 Deadly Sins and the corresponding Life-Giving Virtues (in parentheses). The acronym “PALE GAS” will help you do this.
 - Pride (Humility)
 - Anger (Patience)
 - Lust (Chastity)
 - Envy (Kindness)
 - Gluttony (Temperance)
 - Avarice (Generosity)
 - Sloth (Fortitude)
- Consider making a General Confession (one that encompasses your whole life) sometime within the next year.

Action Items:

- **Where, when, and at what time will you avail yourself of the Sacrament of Penance? At what time will you make your nightly examination of conscience?**
 - Ex. If I am not in immediate need, due to committing a mortal sin, my regular confession will happen on the last Friday of the month at 11 a.m. at Holy Rosary in Portland, OR.
 - Ex. I will examine my conscience and write down my sins at 10 p.m. daily before I go to bed. I will input these into a locked note on my phone or write in my journal.

4. Marian Devotion

Why should we have one? The Blessed Virgin Mary is and was “the perfect Disciple.” She loved Jesus and followed Him as well as anyone could. Now, glorified in Heaven, she can help us to live like she lived. When we devote ourselves to Her we are really devoting ourselves to Jesus on a deeper and more powerful level. She prays for us, transferring to us her humility and her willingness to say “yes” to the will of God in all things. She is truly our spiritual mother, and we couldn’t hope to have a better personal guide to intimacy with Jesus.

How do we cultivate a deeper devotion to Our Lady?

- Learn how to pray the Rosary (what some saints called “the greatest prayer”) and join the Saturday 8:30 a.m. Rosary group.
- Consider consecrating yourself to Jesus through Mary. Read *Preparation for Total Consecration According to St. Louis de Montfort* by Fr. Hugh Gillespie.
- Learn and complete the First Saturday Devotions or make a pilgrimage to The Grotto (The National Sanctuary of our Sorrowful Mother).

Action Item:

- **What type of devotion to the Blessed Mother will you engage and how frequently?**
 - Ex. I will listen to a podcast of the Rosary daily and pray it while on my commute to work/school.

5. Scriptural Meditation

Why is this important? The entirety of the universe has been made by the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. That means there isn't one atom in existence that hasn't passed through the hands of Christ. We can know many things about God's creation just by observing them, but there are some things we can only know when He reveals them to us. He does this through Scripture and Tradition, which together are known as the Deposit of Faith. When we read and pray through the Scriptures, we literally encounter the Truth—Jesus Himself. By encountering Him in this way and carefully meditating on what the biblical authors have written, we can lead a life in which we are constantly and powerfully guided and sanctified.

How can we do this?

- Purchase a good Catholic Bible. The Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (RSVCE) is the most accurately translated Bible in English. The New Testament Study Edition is particularly good for those new to reading the Scriptures.
- Learn to pray the Scriptures using the *Lectio Divina* method. A summary of this method can be found in Living the Faith Level II Session VIII.

Action Item:

- **Which book of the Bible will you begin to pray *Lectio Divina*?**
 - Ex. I will begin with the Gospel of John.

6. Spiritual Reading

Why is this important? Getting to know the saints and the great spiritual writers is crucial in the spiritual life. They were (and are) people just like us. They simply became willing to prefer nothing in the world to God. Their lives and their writings are amazing and should inspire us. Look to “the spiritual classics” as well as modern selections and see who speaks to your heart. A great place to start is with *Rescued* by Fr. John Ricardo and *Be Healed* by Dr. Bob Schuchts. From there it is easier to ingest the beauty of works like St. Therese of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul* or St. Francis de Sales *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

How can we begin pursuing a relationship with one or many of the saints?

- Begin to pray daily to your patron saint. Ask them for advice or prayers concerning what's happening in your life right now.
- Select and purchase a spiritual book that really speaks to you. The books mentioned here either frequently quote saints or are written by a saint.
- Pray a novena to a saint that corresponds to the area of your life that you most wish God would bless or change.

Action Item:

- **Which spiritual book will you begin to prayerfully read?**
 - Ex. I will read *Rescued* by Fr. John Ricardo.

7. Christian Service

Why should we do it? In the second chapter of his epistle, St. James says this: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” We can pursue every good thing, reach for the highest heights of holiness, memorize everything there is to know about God, but if we don’t *live* our faith, it is all devoid of power. To become saints, we must have faith, and we must act, not in contradiction, but in perfect spiritual complementarity.

How do we incorporate service into our lives?

- Memorize the Spiritual Works of Mercy. In which ones do you feel the desire to grow?
 - Counsel the doubtful
 - Forgive injuries
 - Instruct the ignorant
 - Bear wrongs patiently
 - Admonish the sinner
 - Pray for the living and the dead
 - Comfort the sorrowful
- Memorize the Corporal Works of Mercy. Is there a particular merciful work that pulls on your heart?
 - Feed the hungry
 - Give drink to the thirsty
 - Give alms to the poor
 - Shelter the homeless
 - Visit the sick
 - Visit the imprisoned
 - Bury the dead
- Research and find out which methods of spiritual progress in the Church you gravitate toward—e.g. Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, Jesuit, Benedictine, etc. One way to do this is to read the writings of saints who descend from these traditions. From these methods can flow one’s charitable action in the world.

Action Items:

- **What type of service will you choose to serve God and His Church? Where and how frequently?**
 - Ex. I will volunteer as an altar server, sacristan, reader, or usher at Mass.
 - Ex. I will offer my home as a place of gathering for our parish community.
 - Ex. I will donate my time in my area of expertise to the parish.
 - Ex. I will help organize a Work of Mercy in my local parish community.

Note: This plan can be updated as frequently as necessary. Once completed, place a printed copy of the “PSP – Quick Reference” sheet from this packet next to your bed or in another highly visible place. A goal frequently seen, is a goal more easily accomplished.

“Become who you really are. Become a Saint.”

PSP – Quick Reference

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Date:

Parish:

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2. Weekly Mass

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3. Monthly Confession

Where, when, and at what time will you avail yourself of the Sacrament of Penance? At what time will you make your nightly examination of conscience?

4. Marian Devotion

What type of devotion to the Blessed Mother will you engage and how frequently?

5. Scriptural Meditation

In which book of the Bible will you begin to pray *Lectio Divina*?

6. Spiritual Reading

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