

INTRODUCTION

St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) grew up in a wealthy merchant family, expecting to take over his father’s business one day, but his conversion during military service and captivity in an enemy prison focused his attention on following Christ. He soon left behind his privilege and possessions and spent the remainder of his life establishing monastic communities and encouraging the faith of his followers.

St. Francis is still fresh and relevant in a modern world struggling with extremes of materialism and poverty. He articulates a timely need to practice a stewardship that reflects God’s intention for creation. He reminds us what is most important—simplicity, reverence, and a lively faith.

We invite you to follow St. Francis for thirty days and to ponder his thoughts on living in right relationship to God, people, and nature. Each day offers the opportunity to meditate on a brief quote by St. Francis, a related Scripture passage, a prayer, and a suggested practice meant to cultivate renewed thinking and to help you put faith into action.

May St. Francis inspire you to live a life of joyful simplicity, deeper faith, and compassionate care of others.

The quotes from St. Francis were chosen by Lisa Dye,
who also wrote the Prayer and Practice pieces

COVER ART: Marysia Kowalchuk, Madonna House, Combermere, Ontario Canada

Copyright © 2015 Lisa Dye

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS,
a division of Bayard; One Montauk Avenue,
New London, CT 06320. 860-437-3012 or 800-321-0411,
www.23rdpublications.com. No part of this publication
may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission
of the publisher. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-62785-094-0 ■ Printed in the U.S.A.

CHRIST WILL BE WITH ME ALWAYS

*So we, seeing bread and wine with our eyes,
firmly believe it to be his most holy
Body and true and living Blood.
And in this way our Lord is ever with his faithful.*

Scripture

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. **MATTHEW 28:20**

Prayer

Loving Savior, the stress and busyness of life can make it difficult to come to your table consistently, but for these reasons I especially need your presence within me. Seeing your Body and Blood on the altar reminds me that your sustaining strength and life flow into me when I take them. I want to receive communion often, even when I am busy. Help me to receive the Eucharist with joy, with gratitude, and with reverence. Amen.

Practice

Like St. Francis, I will remember Christ is present with me in the Eucharist. I am not alone in any circumstance because Christ is faithful to his promise.

THE IMAGE OF CHRIST

Consider, O people, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for God created and formed you to the image of his beloved Son's body and to the likeness of his Spirit.

Scripture

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

ROMANS 8:29

Prayer

Father, your loving plan is to conform me to the image of your Son so that I might reflect him in all that I think, say, and do. I also want this—and to live in your family. May I treat every brother and sister as also bearing Christ's likeness, for we each are created for this purpose. Amen.

Practice

I will take delight in being formed in the image of God's beloved Son. I will always look for Christ in the face of each person I meet.

SERVING GOD WITH JOY

It is not fitting, when one is in God's service, to have a gloomy face or a chilling look.

Scripture

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1

Prayer

Dear God, I am encouraged that whatever work you give to me to do in this world, you will enable me to do it. Let my face show peace and contentment as I serve you. I look to you, Father, to renew my energy so I might do all things cheerfully and well. Amen.

Practice

I will get the rest I need so I will not be weary in doing my work. I will remember that God gives me new mercies every morning. I will smile and treat people with kindness so that they will also experience God's mercy as I serve them in my work.

LOVE MY NEIGHBOR

Blessed is the servant who loves those who are sick and useless as much as those who are well and can be of service. And blessed is the servant who loves those as well when they are far away as when they are near, and who would speak as lovingly behind another's back as before that person's face.

Scripture

For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

GALATIANS 5:14

Prayer

Merciful Father, you have loved me in my weakness, in my sickness, and in my sin. I want to love others this way too. Please give me a willing spirit to help those in need, to give emotional support to the weak and practical care to the sick, and to respond with kindness to difficult people. Amen.

Practice

I will serve my weak brothers and sisters with the same kindness I would like to receive if I am someday in need of care.

THE TEST OF MY PATIENCE

Servants of God cannot know their interior patience and humility as long as they are content. But when others who should please them oppose them instead, the true store of their patience and humility is revealed.

Scripture

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. **EPHESIANS 4:2–3**

Prayer

Loving Savior, you demonstrated your perfect and patient humility every day. You welcomed the hungry, the sick, and even those who mocked you. Let this lasting fruit of humility be produced in my life for the unity and peace it brings to your church. Please show me where I am lacking in patience, and transform me by your presence. Amen.

Practice

Today I will follow St. Francis by remembering that patience and humility reflect the character of Christ and unify his church.

REWARDS THAT LAST

For, although people lose everything they leave behind in this world, they, nevertheless, carry with them the rewards of charity.

Scripture

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MATTHEW 6:20–21

Prayer

Jesus, you taught that worldly gratifications of power, prestige, and money are gone when I leave this life, but loving and generous acts become treasures in heaven. Help me to live without the distraction of always wanting more. I want to cultivate a simple life and be more giving toward others. Amen.

Practice

I will ask the Holy Spirit to help me discern one way I can live more simply and one way I can give more generously.

NEVER ALONE

Jesus is happy to come with us, as truth is happy to be spoken, as life to be lived, as light to be lit, as love to be loved, as joy to be given, as peace to be spread.

Scripture

Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem...As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. **LUKE 24:13-15**

Prayer

Loving Savior, you ministered in miracles but also in the ordinary things of life—eating, fishing, and walking with friends. Thank you that you delight also to walk with me. Please help me to hear your voice. Let my heart stir with the knowledge of your presence as we walk. Amen.

Practice

When I wake, I will think of Jesus going with me through every activity, and as I fall asleep, I will thank him that he has done so.

LOVE MY ENEMIES?

*We must love our enemies and do good
to those who hate us.*

Scripture

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:43–45

Prayer

This is a hard teaching, dear Jesus. It seems unnatural to love my enemies, and indeed it is. I have no capacity for this kind of divine love apart from your help. Yet this love will identify me as a child of the Father. I want to treat others with goodness, even those who might despise me. I will need your great strength to do this. Amen.

Practice

Today I will think of someone who may bear a grudge against me, and I will pray for that person. I will meet the grudge with an act of goodness.

GOD IS MAKING ME NEW

I have been all things unholy. If God can work through me, he can work through anyone.

Scripture

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

Prayer

Creator God, before meeting Christ on his way to Damascus, the Apostle Paul persecuted Christians with passion and hatred. He even held the robes of those who stoned St. Stephen. Yet in the aftermath of his conversion and baptism, he spent his life serving Christ, carrying his message to the world, and building up your church. Father, I want to be transformed too. Please help me to always have hope that, despite the failures of my past, you are making me new. Amen.

Practice

Today, as I follow Christ, I will offer myself to God with hope and expectation that he will accomplish his purposes through me.

NO FEAR IN LOVE

*Where there is charity and wisdom,
there is neither fear nor ignorance.*

Scripture

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear. **1 JOHN 4:18**

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I confess that ignorance has caused me to react in fear to people of other cultures, ethnicities, or religions. Whether in thought or action, this is not the right response of a child of God. St. Francis taught that fearlessness and wisdom come through love, first by Christ's love *to* me and then by his love *through* me. Help me strive to love and to be truly interested in others. Teach me to trust your love for me so that my fears are driven out. Amen.

Practice

I will think of someone in my neighborhood, at work, or at church who is lonely or left out of community. I will invite that person to coffee or lunch so we can learn more about each other.

PATIENCE AND HUMILITY

*Where there is patience and humility,
there is neither anger nor worry.*

Scripture

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than oneself. **PHILIPPIANS 2:3**

Prayer

Lord God, your own Son patiently endured suffering and humbly submitted to your will for the sake of all he came to save. I too want to seek your will. Let me also work for the good of others as I interact with them, so that they will have no cause to worry over their well-being in relationship to me. Please help me to practice such patience in my daily dealings so that no one perceives impatience from me or is provoked to impatience by me. Amen.

Practice

If I am struggling to be patient with someone, I will examine my thoughts to discover if selfishness or a superior attitude is impeding my good care of them.

WORRY AND WASTED ENERGY

*Where there is rest and meditation,
there is neither anxiety nor restlessness.*

Scripture

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” LUKE 10:41–42

Prayer

Christ Jesus, you spoke to Martha not out of anger but out of loving concern. You wanted her to see that too much busyness was wasting her energy and making her upset. Your words inspire me to carefully consider how I am to live. Do my activities distract me from time with you? Please help me to come often and sit with you as Mary did. I need to be refreshed and restored in your presence daily. Amen.

Practice

Today, I will make a list of my activities and responsibilities and prayerfully reevaluate them. I will sit quietly and wait for your guidance.

HONORING GOD WITH MY BODY

*And let us always make in us a tabernacle
and dwelling place for him,
who is the Lord God Omnipotent,
Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Scripture

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **ROMANS 12:1**

Prayer

Father, your mercy draws me into communion with you through the Body and Blood of your Son and the outpouring of your Spirit. Let my body always be a welcome and pure place where you are happy to live. Help me to abandon practices that contaminate me physically, mentally, or spiritually. May your wisdom and strength help me choose the worthy thoughts and activities that please you. Amen.

Practice

I will ask the Father if I dishonor him by unhealthy or impure habits and how I might better honor him.

EMPTY BEFORE GOD

I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of Jesus Christ our Most High Lord and of his Most Holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end.

Scripture

He began to teach them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

MATTHEW 5:2–3

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your mother’s true poverty was her emptiness before the Father, so that she could bear you into the world. Your own life reflected the true poverty for which you came—to empty yourself, become a servant, and submit to death on a cross. I too want a surrendered will. I want your kingdom. Help me, now and always, to come before the Father clinging to nothing. Amen.

Practice

I will identify and abandon anything that stands in the way of God’s will for me, whether reputation or relationship, possession or pride.

CHRIST'S BROTHER, SISTER, AND MOTHER

We are spouses when by the Holy Spirit the faithful are united to Jesus Christ. We are his brothers and sisters when we do the will of his Father who is in heaven. We are his mothers when we bear him in hearts and bodies through pure love and clean conscience.

Scripture

Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother. **MARK 3:35**

Prayer

Loving Savior, how wonderful that you invite me to be in your family! I can be your brother, sister, and mother as I love you and do good for the people in my life in your name. Like St. Francis, may I always love so purely and live so rightly that others will encounter you. Amen.

Practice

I will be in relationship to Christ as I do God's will, practice integrity, and love my people.

HONORING GOD WITH MY WORDS

God, all powerful, most holy sublime ruler of all, you alone are good—supremely, fully, completely good. May we render to you all praise, all honor and blessing. Amen.

Scripture

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. **HEBREWS 13:15**

Prayer

Holy God, please forgive my weak offerings of worship and let my reverence for you be always increasing. I want to honor you with a heart full of the praise that you are due. Help me to learn to speak *to* you and *of* you with words that are worthy of your greatness. You are all that is good and loving and holy. Blessed be your name! Amen.

Practice

I will meditate on God's greatness. I will cultivate a spirit of praise and give others glimpses of God's majesty as I speak with words that honor him.

DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

*Hail, O Lady, Mary, holy Mother of God...
Hail his Palace! Hail his Tabernacle! Hail his Home!
Hail his Robe! Hail his Servant! Hail his Mother!*

Scripture

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. **EXODUS 25:8**

Prayer

Hail Mary! You are the human house of God, a vivid expression of the Father's desire to be present in this world, first in the garden, then in a wilderness tabernacle, and finally in the most intimate way possible—in human flesh. You show me how to welcome Christ, to care for him, to love him, and to make every circumstance of life an opportunity for a fresh advent of his coming. This is my holy privilege. Amen.

Practice

Like Mary, I will welcome Christ to live in me and have use of all that I am and all that I have.

HEALERS AND HELPERS IN THIS WORLD

We have been called to heal wounds, to bring together what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way.

Scripture

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. **GALATIANS 6:2**

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you sent your Son to bear the world's brokenness and burdens. Now you desire that your children be the fragrance of his beauty and salvation here, also bearing burdens and helping to bring social, material, and spiritual order to this eagerly awaiting world. By any gifts, energy, and creativity you lend me, I want to heal, rebuild, restore, and unite. I want to help the lost and floundering find you. Amen.

Practice

Today, I will look for a burden I can carry for a hurting person or offer my time and resources to serve someone in need.

A LETTER FROM CHRIST

*It is no use walking anywhere to preach
unless our walking is our preaching.*

Scripture

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. **2 CORINTHIANS 3:3**

Prayer

Remind me each day, dear God, that others may draw their conclusions about Christ by observing my life. I am to be his letter to the people I meet. My words mean nothing if my attitudes and actions do not support them. Let your Spirit make me a living letter worthy of your Son. I want to also gratefully and eagerly “read” Christ’s inspiring letters of others to me, written in lives like St. Francis’. Amen.

Practice

I will rely less on words and more on my actions to reflect Christ in this world.

JUDGE WITH MERCY

But those who have received the power to judge others should exercise judgment with mercy as they themselves desire to receive mercy from the Lord.

Scripture

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

MATTHEW 5:7

Prayer

Father, mercy is your response to the worst human failings. I am always in need of your mercy. Open my eyes to this measureless gift. When I also have the opportunity to be merciful, let me do so willingly. At times, my spouse, my child, my friend, or my coworker will fail me and need my mercy instead of harsh judgment. I will also fail them and need theirs. I want to give mercy because I have already received it from you, Lord, and because I desire to receive it always. Amen.

Practice

With God's help, I will respond, to those who fail me, with the great mercy I have received from God.

ALL OF MYSELF

Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves so that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally.

Scripture

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. **MATTHEW 19:29**

Prayer

Loving Savior, you willingly gave your life to bring me into God's family and lead me to eternal life. Desiring only good for me, you ask me to daily give myself to you so that I might fully live in you and share your rich inheritance. Often I will see the immediate blessing, but at times it may mean the painful sacrifice of something dear. I need your help to withhold nothing of myself. Amen.

Practice

In my heart, I will offer my treasures to God, so that if he asks, I will freely give them.

BREAD OF LIFE

O sublime humility! That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God, should humble himself like this under the form of a little bread, for our salvation.

Scripture

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. **JOHN 6:51**

Prayer

Father, you are the great I AM, so holy that no one could see you and live. Yet in love you sent your Son, who came saying, “I am the bread of life,” and revealing yourself—true God from true God. Fully human and fully divine in nature, Christ invites me to come near and receive life in Holy Communion. Thank you, Father. Amen.

Practice

I will embrace Christ and his life in the Eucharist, because I long for God’s presence.

WORTHY WORDS

Blessed is the servant who does not speak hoping for rewards, who does not speak too much or too quickly, and who wisely plans every response.

Scripture

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. JAMES 1:26

Prayer

Dear Jesus, you are the very Word of God. All your words are loving, true, and merciful, born from your nature of goodness. I confess that at times I misuse my tongue in flattery, gossip, harsh language, deceit, and words that tear others down. Forgive me when I do this, and ignite in me a purpose to speak only edifying words that flow out of a pure heart. May your Spirit guard my mouth from speaking in haste, anger, carelessness, and self-interest. Amen.

Practice

I will speak less, but when I do, I will speak kindly and with encouragement.

BROTHER SUN

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!

Scripture

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good...who made the great lights...the sun to govern the day, for his love endures forever. **PSALM 136:1, 7, 8**

Prayer

Creator God, I often miss the majesty of what you have made. Forgive me if I wake up not noticing the sun or forgetting it is there on a cloudy day. Remind me that your loving provision is more than my daily food; it also comes in the order and mighty workings of the universe. I share a fellowship with all of nature, because you, Lord, are the maker of the heavens and the earth and me. Amen.

Practice

I will take a walk, noticing God's handiwork, and I will give thanks.

REMEMBER REVERENCE

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Scripture

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

PSALM 8:3–4

Prayer

Almighty God, the moon and stars and the far reaches of the universe are the work of your fingers and refining touches on your vast creation. Yet your children, so small in comparison, are formed in your image and enlivened with your breath. Please help me to treasure all nature and life as holy, viewing them as an expression of your divine will and goodness.

Practice

I will remember that all I see is the work of God's fingers. I will not be careless with people or destructive of nature.

TRUE CORRECTION

Blessed is the servant who, when corrected, easily submits, modestly obeys, humbly confesses, and willingly satisfies.

Scripture

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. **HEBREWS 12:11**

Prayer

St. Francis submitted himself to you, Lord Jesus, and this compelled others to look to him for instruction with trust. Although accepting criticism is difficult, I want to do so willingly. Help me overcome hurt feelings and learn to humbly receive the spiritual, vocational, and relational corrections that sharpen and refine me. May I always receive instruction graciously and administer it kindly. Amen.

Practice

I will recognize correction as God's training. I will delight those in authority by my desire to learn and my respect for them.

OBEY IN LOVE

Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God. Keep his commandments with all your heart and fulfill his counsels with a perfect mind.

Scripture

If you love me, you will obey what I command.

JOHN 14:15

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your obedience to the Father was born of love rather than duty. You always listened with a pure desire to do your Father's will. I want to listen to you this way, even if your path for me becomes difficult. Let my love for you increase daily so that I might overcome both obstacles and fear in obeying you. By your strength and presence, help me follow your leading as I discern it in prayer, in Scripture, and in the instructions of the church. Amen.

Practice

I will respond to Christ's leading and prove my love for him by my trust and obedience.

ENJOYMENT IN GOD'S KINGDOM

Your kingdom come: rule us now, through grace, and bring us at last to your kingdom of light where we shall see you as you are, and our love for you will be made perfect, our union blissful, our joy unending, in you.

Scripture

Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." **LUKE 17:20–21**

Prayer

O God, I cannot physically see your kingdom, but I perceive it in persons like St. Francis who mirrored it beautifully as your grace ruled them, a vision of you inspired them, love of you led them, and enjoyment of you drew them toward heaven. Help me to live in this same gladness of your presence. Amen.

Practice

I will help my family and coworkers seek heaven as I enjoy the Father.

FINISHING THE RACE

*I have done my part, may Jesus
teach you to do yours.*

THE LAST WORDS OF ST. FRANCIS

Scripture

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith. **2 TIMOTHY 4:7**

Prayer

Christ Jesus, St. Francis inspires me by his steadfast perseverance, having endured prison, poverty, and sickness, and having worked hard to renew the faith and practices of those within your church. He understood what it meant to keep the flame of his love for you burning until his last breath. I need this same strength to persevere in all you have appointed me to do. Please bring my faith to completion and teach me to pursue your calling for me until the end. Amen.

Practice

I will remember that what Christ began in me, he will complete. By his help, I will persevere through difficulty, love him always, and finish my own race.

SINGING FOR GOD

*What are the servants of God but his singers
whose duty it is to lift up the hearts of men and
women and move them to spiritual joy?*

Scripture

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord. **EPHESIANS 5:19**

Prayer

O God, I want to be one of your servants, one who lives in such a way that I sing of your goodness, lifting up others. This would seem a lighthearted task, but in reality it means to encourage and give them help in the face of life's desperations. How can I impart courage unless I have it myself? St. Francis sang hymns even as he died; he helped others face life bravely. Please lend me this same trust and spirit of great joy to share. Amen.

Practice

I will encourage others to be heroic and joyful in their difficulties.