

A day to set down the work, pick up the axe, and let God sharpen the blade.

Pastoral resources and activities for rest, prayer, and renewal at this year's staff retreat.

06
Praying with Beads

12
The Prayer of Examen

15
Seven Trails Worth Walking

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Need a plan *to get going?*

If you're like me, sometimes I need a plan to get going. Besides watching the videos from local pastors, our own VCS Spiritual Formation Team put together some resources to help you make the most of today. Feel free to experiment or create your own experience.

— Steve Dang

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MARCUS MARTINEZ

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STEVE DANG

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SOUNDTRACK FOR THE DAY

The Worship Playlist

Put it on in the car, on the trail, or wherever you land to pray.

▶ LISTEN ON SPOTIFY

open.spotify.com/playlist/1YQvR1PZXydL8ISMFtsA6F

Rhythms of Rest *and Renewal*

BY MARCUS MARTINEZ

> *"Make your home in My love."*
>
> JOHN 15:9

Serving at Valley Christian is holy work, and it can also be exhausting. Whether you teach a class, keep our campuses safe, balance the books, or greet families at the front desk, you pour yourselves out for students, families, and one another, and at this time of year that adds up. This is why we have this day, welcome to our Staff Retreat: Sharp and Ready.

Rest that only sets the axe down isn't enough. Step away, choose what restores your soul, and return sharp for the work God has called you to.

This planning guide is an invitation to slow down, root yourself in Christ, and let Jesus shape the way you live and work.

These five intentional rhythms are pillars of rest and spirituality. They are how to stay sharp throughout the year. They are not about perfection but about daily surrender. They help us work with intention, steward our gifts well, and trust God to provide as we share the love and hope of Jesus with our students, families, and one another.

01 ABIDING IN GOD

02 REST AND RENEWAL

03 MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

04 PURPOSEFUL WORK

05 WORSHIP AND CHURCH COMMUNITY

Five intentional rhythms

01 Abiding in God

Lasting transformation comes through the Word of God. Take time for Scripture, prayer, silence, and reflection. Not as tasks to complete, but as space to receive God's presence.

REFLECTION

When and where will I slow down and meet with Jesus this week?

What small daily step (Scripture, prayer, journaling, silence) will keep me rooted in Him?

02 Rest and Renewal

Rest is an act of surrender. Sabbath, stillness, and life-giving activities remind us that we are not in control; God is. We are reminded that we are loved for who we are, not for what we do. As we rest, He restores.

REFLECTION

When will I intentionally rest this week and cease striving?

What activity (walk, music, art, nature, nap, reading) will renew my soul?

03 Meaningful Relationships

Spiritual health grows in community. God places people in our lives to both pour into us and to receive from us. Community keeps us humble, accountable, and encouraged.

REFLECTION

Who is God inviting me to invest in or receive from this week?

When will I intentionally connect and stay present in relationship?

04 Purposeful Work

Your work is more than a job description; it is Kingdom work. Whether you are teaching a lesson, walking a campus patrol, reconciling an account, or fixing a broken door, each task, conversation, and act of care is a chance to integrate Christ's love and point students, families, and coworkers to the beauty of His Kingdom.

REFLECTION

How can I prepare prayerfully for the work in front of me this week?

What opportunities do I see to bring Christ's presence into my classroom, office, or corner of campus?

05 Worship and Church Community

Faith cannot be lived in isolation. Worshiping, serving, and belonging to a church family ground us in the bigger story of God's people.

REFLECTION

Am I consistently engaging in worship, small group, or serving at church?

What is my next step toward rootedness in my church community?

RHYTHMS OF REST AND RENEWAL

Weekly Checkpoints

Commitments for Healthy Work and Ministry

- [ ] Whatever my role, my priority is to remain in loving union with Jesus each day.
- [ ] I open my interior life fully to God, allowing Him to shape my thoughts, emotions, and decisions.
- [ ] When I feel anxious, I slow down, turning toward God, myself, and others with patience and presence.
- [ ] I discern carefully before saying yes or no, giving time and space to seek God's will.
- [ ] I refuse to move so quickly that I miss simply abiding in the presence of Jesus.
- [ ] I regularly step back from work to delight in God's gifts with gratitude.
- [ ] I practice meditating on Scripture and meeting with God in prayer.
- [ ] I set aside intentional times of silence and solitude, still and undistracted before Him.
- [ ] I rest in the truth that I am loved for who I am, not for what I accomplish.
- [ ] I trust that God is God and I am not, so I entrust the fruit of my labor into His hands.
- [ ] I remain rooted in a local church and community of believers for encouragement and accountability.
- [ ] I turn my thoughts toward God often throughout my day, cultivating an awareness of His presence.

ENCOURAGEMENT

True growth always happens day by day. Transformation is never something we manufacture; it is the Spirit's work as we surrender, slow down, and live with intention in Christ.

Our desire is for you to flourish, not only in your work but in your walk with God. ***Your soul matters. You are seen, valued, and deeply loved.***

We are committed to walking with you in Christ as you serve and lead. May we remain united and faithful to the mission of Valley Christian, serving with excellence, following Jesus, and shaping students for His Kingdom.

— SPIRITUAL FORMATION PASTORAL TEAM



PRACTICE · PRAYER

Prayer Bracelets

Fifty-nine beads, one cross, and the drive to the top of Skyway: a simple way to pray your way into the day.

BY STEVE DANG

> ***"Each bead was intentional. Each bead represented something meaningful."***

MAKE YOUR OWN

Nylon string, beads of your choice, and a cross (optional). You can find a complete Amazon kit here.

I never quite understood prayer beads used by some Christian traditions until I saw a video of an elderly monk who was praying in his bed. He did this every day at regular rhythms. Each bead was intentional. Each bead represented something meaningful.

I recently started reading about prayer beads and put together my own to help guide my prayers. Mine has 59 beads total. They are made up of 6 big beads, 53 little ones, and a cross that holds it all together.

It takes me the exact amount of time to start praying when I get in my car to the top of Skyway. Here is what it looks like for me as I pray my way through the bracelet.

Praying bead by bead

Start at the cross and move around the circle. The big beads anchor you in the prayers of the church; the little beads in between set the rhythm of your breathing.



Big beads · Lord's Prayer / Generosity Creed

Little beads · The Jesus Prayer

†

THE CROSS

The Apostles' Creed

Earliest written form found c. AD 341. Full text on the next page.

BIG BEADS 1 · 3 · 5

The Lord's Prayer

BIG BEADS 2 · 4 · 6

The Generosity Creed

The creed my church recites every weekend.

EACH LITTLE BEAD

The Jesus Prayer

One breath per bead.

†

BACK TO THE CROSS

Your own prayer

Praise, intercession, requests, and surrender.

BREATHE IN

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,

BREATHE OUT

have mercy on me.

ON EVERY LITTLE BEAD · LUKE 18:35–43

What to pray on each bead

THE CROSS

The Apostles' Creed

Earliest written form c. AD 341 · history & origins

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

BEADS 1 · 3 · 5

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9–13

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

BEADS 2 · 4 · 6

The Generosity Creed

Based on 1 Timothy 6:6, 7, 9, 17, 18 and Matthew 6:20

Godliness with contentment is great gain. We bring nothing into this world and we take nothing out of it. We who call Jesus Lord, devote ourselves to resisting greed which plunges the human heart into ruin, and pierces it with many griefs. We are determined to practice generosity with free hearts, fixing our hope on God and not the uncertainty of wealth. We desire to be rich in good deeds and willing to share all that we have, laying up for ourselves treasure that will not decay but will shine in the age to come.

Not legalistic. *Just profoundly centering.*

Then I put the bracelet on my wrist. It's not meant to be legalistic. But I've found it profoundly centering before the chaos of the day.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

reminds me that I'm connected to something bigger than myself. Something ancient. Something the church has prayed for centuries.

THE LITTLE BEADS

remind me how deeply I need Jesus: in every moment, in every breath, in every day.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

reminds me to forgive as I've been forgiven and to trust God for my daily bread.

THE GENEROSITY CREED

reminds me that what I have isn't just for me. It's meant to be shared, and it turns my heart toward contentment in every situation.

MY OWN WORDS

Closing in my own words reminds me that prayer is a conversation, not just a recitation.

Whether you make your own bracelet or buy one, maybe turning your heart and attention to God before the day begins will help keep you grounded *in Scripture, in worship, in prayer, and in the long story of God's people.*

A BLESSING

May God, through His Spirit, speak to you today, granting rest, comfort, guidance, and peace. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL · BIBLICAL UNITY

Hope Rooted *in Faith*

BY STEVEN MCGRIFF, PH.D.

> *Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.*
>
> HEBREWS 11:1

HER STORY · MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

Mary McLeod Bethune was born in 1875 in Mayesville, South Carolina, as the 15th of 17 children. Her parents had been enslaved, but later managed to buy their own cotton farm. Mary was the first child in her family to be born free.

She trained to become a teacher and taught in mission schools throughout the South. However, she had a dream of opening a school specifically for Black girls. On October 3, 1904, she opened a school in Daytona Beach, Florida, with just $1.50, five young students, her own five-year-old son, and her faith in God.

Lacking funds for supplies, she creatively made them herself. Charred wood was transformed into pencils, elderberries became ink, and corn sacks stuffed with moss served as mattresses.

Within two years, the school grew to accommodate 250 students. It later merged with the Cookman Institute and became Bethune-Cookman College. In 1931, Bethune made history by becoming the first African American woman to serve as a college president.

Starting almost from nothing, she faithfully placed her vision, efforts, and most of all, hope, in God's hands.

$1.50
What she started the school with in 1904

5
Young students on the first day, plus her son

250
Students within two years

1931
First African American woman to serve as a college president

IN HER OWN WORDS

From "My Last Will and Testament," published posthumously in 1955, as an address to the generations after her.

"Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible."

— MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE, *EBONY*, 1955

REFLECTION

Five girls and $1.50 did not look like a university. Bethune saw something no one else could see yet. In the short devotional below, Katara Patton of Our Daily Bread connects that kind of vision to Matthew 19 and Hebrews 11:1. She shares one account of Bethune's dream in action. Read it and ask: **What might God see in the students in front of me that I don't see yet?**

READ OR LISTEN

"Faith Rooted in God"

Katara Patton · Our Daily Bread · June 24, 2026

odb.org/2026/06/24 →

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

? Where else in Scriptures do we find examples of God using a little bit of something and making much more of it?

? What examples do you remember from your life where you started with faith before you found hope?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for courageous stories of faith, hope, and resilience from past generations. In moments when our path feels uncertain, anchor our hope in Your eternal faithfulness. Help us to trust in your steadfast love and sovereign grace, not our limited vision and understanding. Grant us the courage to walk by faith and not by sight, holding firmly to Your promises through every season. Amen.

Hebrews 11:1 · Proverbs 3:5–6

ONE SMALL ACTION

What's your hope or dream you want to place in God's hands?

Share your response with the VCS staff!

PRACTICE · PRAYER

The Examen

Reviewing your day in God's presence

BY ANNA MESSERSMITH

The Examen is a reflective practice that invites individuals to review their day in God's presence, recognizing moments of gratitude, feelings, and spiritual insights.

It encourages a deeper awareness of how God's grace operates in daily life, fostering personal growth and a closer relationship with God.

HOW TO USE IT

Find a quiet spot. Move slowly through the seven movements on the next page. Linger wherever you sense God's nudge; there's no need to finish.

Take your time with each one

01

PRESENCE

Ask God to open your eyes to His working presence in your life today.

02

LOVE

Did you see anyone through the eyes of Christ's love today?

03

GRATITUDE

Where did you see the goodness of God in the simple and mundane things?

04

CONFESSION

Is there any sin you must acknowledge and request God's forgiveness?

05

LISTENING

What does the Lord want you to know?

06

SURRENDER

Pray for grace to be more fully available to God, who fully loves you.

07

OUR FATHER

Recite the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13).

PRACTICE · WONDER

Mindfulness *Wonder Walk*

BY THE WELLNESS TEAM

Whether on a stroll in your neighborhood or on a secluded hike, allow for moments to take in your surroundings. Notice the vastness of the sky, the way the squirrels flit around and the birds soar above. Hear the leaves in the breeze and the birdsong.

See how the insects mill about and feel how the sun warms your body and your legs carry you without thinking. Do you see an unusual plant, dancing water, or a peculiar rock? What about the passing clouds in the wind?... Let your anxious thoughts be carried as so.

Let the wonder of creation beckon you. Be in awe. Feel appreciation rise in your being for the glory of God is all around us.

AS YOU WALK, NOTICE

LOOK UP	The vastness of the sky, birds soaring, clouds passing
LISTEN	Leaves in the breeze, birdsong
FEEL	The sun's warmth, your legs carrying you
LOOK CLOSE	An unusual plant, dancing water, a peculiar rock

"Let the wonder of creation beckon you. Be in awe."

UP NEXT

Hiking Spots

Seven local trails for your wonder walk

TURN THE PAGE →

PRACTICE · CREATION

Hiking Spots

Each of these hikes can be as long or as short as you'd like. Get outside, walk slowly, and pray as you go.

01	**John Nicholas Trail** LOS GATOS, CA	3–10 miles	ALLTRAILS →
02	**Saratoga Gap & Ridge Loop** CASTLE ROCK / PALO ALTO	5 miles	ALLTRAILS →
03	**Bridge Creek Trail to Maple Falls** APTOS, CA	5.8 miles	ALLTRAILS →
04	**Hickory Oaks, Long Ridge Road** PALO ALTO, CA	5.3 miles	ALLTRAILS →
05	**Arrowhead Loop** MORGAN HILL, CA	3.9 miles	ALLTRAILS →
06	**Fort Ord** MONTEREY, CA	5.9 miles	ALLTRAILS →
07	**Point Lobos Loop** MONTEREY, CA	6.3 miles	ALLTRAILS →

Make sure to share your photos!
Snap the view, the trail, the people you walked with.

Take some intentional time today to be with Jesus in prayer.

We hope you encounter His love for you and experience the peace and restoration that only He can provide.

We love you, Valley Christian Staff!

WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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PRAYER BRACELETS

Steven McGriff, Ph.D.
DEVOTIONAL: HOPE ROOTED IN FAITH

Anna Messersmith
THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

Wellness Team
MINDFULNESS WONDER WALK

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RHYTHMS OF REST AND RENEWAL

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RESOURCES & WORSHIP PLAYLIST

VALLEY CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS™
SPIRITUAL FORMATION