

# CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES FOR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

This guide for elementary and middle school educators is intended to supplement the guidance offered in *Be Still and Know*, which is written primarily for an audience of high school and university educators.

## Core Practices for Christian Schools

The following elements of the book are relevant to all Christian schools, elementary through college:

- how we inhabit time (Chapter 2)
- building community and working together (Chapter 4)
- balancing work, study, rest, and recreation (Chapter 6)

## Adapted Teaching Practices

The following practices from Chapter 3 of *Be Still and Know* can be modified for younger learners:

### **Slow Reading:**

Read short passages of scripture or other texts following the method of ***lectio divina***: read slowly two times, meditate on a word or phrase, talk with God about the phrase, rest in silent prayer.

### **Visio Divina:**

Similar to *lectio divina*, you can attentively study artwork, icons, or nature by patiently looking, meditating on a particular feature, talking with God about it, and ending with silent pray.

### **Movement:**

Engage students' bodily ways of knowing by responding to questions with hand gestures or movement (i.e., Four Corners Exercise). Act out scenes from scripture or literature.

### **Deep Listening:**

Play music or read aloud a story and invite students to listen attentively without interrupting. Discuss their experience afterward. Practice active, attentive listening with each other.

### **Contemplative Writing/Drawing:**

Provide prompts related to the lesson theme. Encourage students to write or draw whatever comes to mind, allowing their thought to slowly deepen and mature.

### **Memorization/Recitation:**

Memorize and recite poems and prayers. Repeat them slowly and thoughtfully, focusing on the meaning of the words.

# Contemplative Practices for Younger Learners

The following practices and resources are especially appropriate for elementary and middle schools.

## Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (<https://www.cgsusa.org/>) offers an excellent foundation for contemplative pedagogy in elementary classrooms. The basic method of CGS involves:

1. students listening attentively as the teacher reads a passage of Scripture aloud (e.g., the parable of the good shepherd)
2. collective wondering/meditation on questions about the text
3. individual meditation through play with objects related to the passage (e.g., figurines of the shepherd and sheep)
4. communal prayer or song

## Nurturing Attention

The capacity to give our attention fully is essential to learning, work, relationships, and prayer. This capacity can be nurtured in children in the following ways:

### Explore:

Allow children to discover and explore subjects that interest them (e.g., by giving students the option of which activity or station they will engage in).

### Recharge:

Provide ample time for recreational play (ideally 30-60 minutes/day) so students can recharge and return ready to learn.

### Play:

Encourage imaginative play, working with materials, and other hands-on activities. Refer to CGS for more examples.

### Minimize Digital Tech:

Reduce screen time and create tech-free zones in the classroom. Prioritize embodied play and face-to-face interaction.

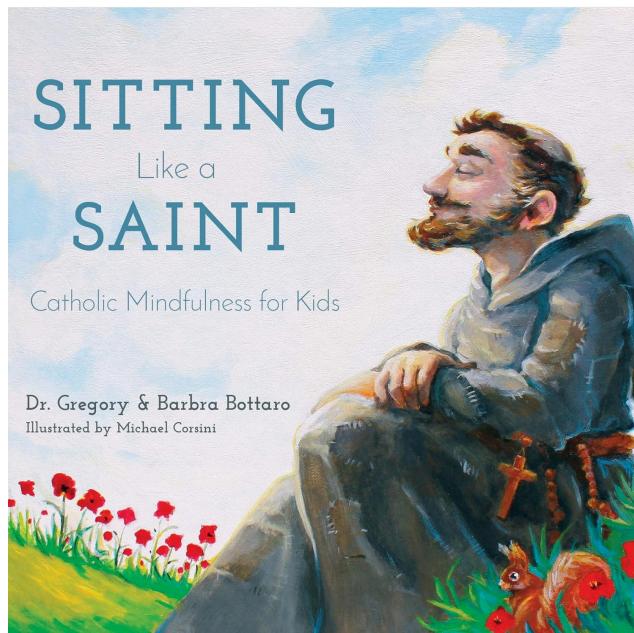
## Cultivating Compassion

Compassion is a core Christian value and has many benefits for well-being and interpersonal relating. Catholic psychologist Dr. Gregory Bottaro recommends this exercise for cultivating compassion:

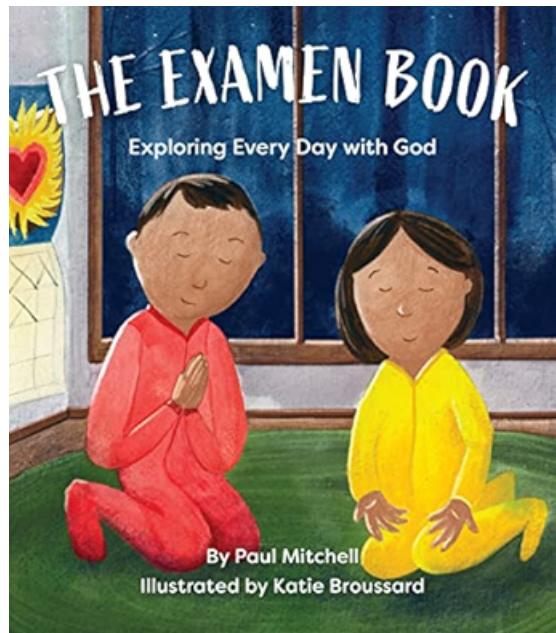
1. Begin by calming your mind and body, focusing on your breathing.
2. Repeat these phrases: "May I be free from suffering. May I be happy. May I be at peace."
3. Repeat these phrases, directing them toward a loved one.
4. Repeat these phrases, directing them toward a stranger.
5. Repeat these phrases, directing them toward someone difficult.

## Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation

Some of the most important areas of development for children include awareness and self-regulation of emotions and relating to others. The following books are excellent resources for promoting growth in these areas through Christian practices:



Gregory and Barbara Bottaro's book guides children through a variety of prayerful exercises self-awareness and self-regulation while also learning about the saints. Bottaro draws upon Christian practices for promoting interior peace and calm that long predicated (and influenced) modern Social Emotional Learning (SEL).



Paul Mitchell's book leads young readers through an age-appropriate version of the Ignatian Examen that especially emphasizes attention to the feelings they experienced throughout the day.

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