

SOUL CARE

∞ FOR ∞

TEACHERS

20 Practices
to Boost Your Spirit
and Well-Being

CAROLE EIPERS



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Say Please and Thank You

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG, WE WERE TAUGHT TO SAY PLEASE AND THANK YOU. You were probably reminded frequently to ask for something saying please and to thank anyone who did something for you or gave you a gift.

It's easy when we are busy and harried to omit these simple niceties. Yet it can refresh us to remember. Sometimes people are surprised when I say please. At the grocery store when they ask, "Paper or plastic," I frequently respond, "Paper bags, please." The cashier and bagger will both look at me and smile.

At the toll booth, I often say "Thank you" to the attendant as he takes my money. Again, a surprised smile appears on a weary face. Thank a student for doing an act of kindness; the student may be surprised, since we don't always remember to thank younger people. It also reinforces the student's own please-and-thank-you behavior.

Relish the pleases and thank yous that come your way. We can often take them for granted. Focus on the gifts in your life—thank those who provided those gifts. Thank God too!

Don't hesitate to ask for help—but say please. And always ask God for the help he is generously offering, please!



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Keep a list for one day of people who say please and thank you to you. Treasure each one!

PRAYER

*Blind beggar, you who asked Jesus, "Lord, please let me see,"
remind me that Jesus is waiting for me to ask for what I need.
Tenth leper, you who came back to Jesus to thank him for healing you,
remind me to be grateful.
Blind beggar and tenth leper, intercede for me! Amen.*

Be a Learner

AS A TEACHER, I FOUND I COULD ALWAYS LEARN SOMETHING NEW ABOUT MY STUDENTS. I could find out their concerns and fears, their hopes and joys, if I asked and listened. Certainly, teachers learn about the students' abilities and their challenges in learning. Sometimes, we can forget that some learning is difficult for some students.

I tried, at least once a year, to learn something new. I tried to learn Spanish but found it very difficult. I tried to go back to learning tap dancing—which I had abandoned as a child—but found my feet moved no better than they did when I was young. I read and watched videos and talked with knowledgeable people to learn about the United Arab Emirates before I traveled there.

Becoming learners can be invigorating! After a tough time teaching, it can renew our perspective on learning to be learners. I remember it doesn't always come easily. I practice patience with myself as I struggle, and my patience quota with others increases too.

What would you like to learn? To paint a watercolor? To play an instrument? Lose yourself in learning for the joy of it—and to be a better teacher.



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Learn something new!
Reflect on the experience of learning.

PRAYER

Saint John Baptist de la Salle, patron of teachers, pray for us.

Saint Gemma Galgani, patron of students, pray for us.

Jesus the Teacher, help us to learn from your example of wise teaching.

Amen.

Relish Beauty

WE ARE SURROUNDED BY BEAUTY: the beauty of creation, the beauty of people’s faces, the beauty of the arts and of words well-written or spoken.

Where do you find beauty? Play some music, walk through your home, look carefully at any art or religious symbols. Look at the photos you have, and then look out the window. Where do you find beauty? I sometimes realize that I don’t look—always in a hurry—missing the beauty that surrounds me all the time.

Is there beauty in nature around where you live? When I lived in New York City, there wasn’t much nature—but I appreciated the beauty of the architecture and the sounds of church bells ringing. Take a walk, spend time with a tree and read the poem “Trees” by Joyce Kilmer, or take in the colors of flowers and even the shades of green in the grass and bushes. What beauty resides in your school? Is there student artwork, or colorful statues? What beauty can you bring to share?

Look at the faces of people you see each day—your family, colleagues, students, friends, and workers in places you patronize. See all the different colors of eyes, shapes of smiles, wrinkles made by worries and joys. Each face is an image of God, and that makes each beautiful!



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Do something to add to the beauty of the world.
Plant a flower or tree; do an artwork; smile all day!

PRAYER

Creator God, you have endowed the earth and all its people with such tremendous beauty. Clear my vision that I may see beauty everywhere and in every person. Amen.

Take a Walk

MOVEMENT CAN BE HEALING AND ENERGIZING. I work with a personal trainer each week. She was once a junior high student of mine, and I find that very motivating when I don't feel like doing my exercises. And when I do get up and begin moving, I enjoy the challenge and find renewed energy.

What is your favorite way of moving? Do you enjoy a walk with a friend or walking to the coffee shop for a morning brew? If you're a dancer, put on some music and move with vigor.

Movement has a long history of use to praise God. In the Old Testament, the people praised God with music and dance. In many cultures movement is part of the expression of joy and is sometimes used in liturgy. Movement can be prayer praising God for our abilities and expressing our love for him. Try praying with your students using some arm movements, or walk and pray with them.

Run around your block or skip with a child; do a somersault; feel the strength and flexibility of your muscles. Using our bodies helps us to remember the blessing and miracle of mobility.



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Sometimes movement is difficult. Age, injury, or disease may limit our ability to move. Reach out to someone who is less mobile.

If it is someone who can't walk at all, offer to take them out—
a walk with their wheelchair, or a ride in your car.

PRAYER

Creator God, we are wonderfully made by you. Grace me to move, to appreciate my abilities, and to care for those less able than I. Amen.

Practice Joy

MY FRIEND IS AN AMAZING GARDENER. Nothing gives her greater joy than planting seeds, watching them grow, caring for them each day, and seeing them blossom into beautiful flowers and delicious vegetables. She loves to show her garden, proudly announcing that dying plants that were given to her are now flourishing.

There is such joy to be found in planting, caring for new life, celebrating growth, and displaying what has blossomed. Every teacher is a gardener, planting seeds of knowledge and skill, seeds of faith and virtue.

You care for the seeds through lessons and reviews and encouragement. What joy when you behold growth, though it may be slow. You have shared the joy of learning and the joy your students feel when they have mastered a concept.

Like my friend, you can find joy in displaying what has grown. When you display students' work in the halls or on the website, your pride in their learning is only equaled by their pride in what has grown within them. A good teacher finds joy at every step—the planting, the caring, the growth, and the fruit of all the efforts. Practice the joy!



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Think about the joy you find in teaching. Plan a ritual for a student's growth—a special prayer, or a photo in the school newsletter. Make it a joyful recognition!

PRAYER

Jesus, you came to bring life to the full. Help me to bring life and joy to my students and to embrace all the joy you give me. Amen.