

# Holiness in Wholeness

12- Month Pocket Guide



Mission: To unite with others in reducing unnecessary suffering and increasing opportunities for joy as it pertains to God's design of human beings and the world.

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# January

## ACTIVITY

**St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821)**

*“The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will.”*

## PROMISE

- Evidence indicates that exercise protects against the deterioration of our chromosomes
- Exercise is a key factor in healthy skin, reducing chronic pain, and protecting vision against long-term decline
- Research indicates that 50% of cancers could be prevented through healthy lifestyle factors, including regular exercise
- Exercise is as effective in treating mild to moderate depression as medication and therapy

## ACTION STEPS

- Mild to moderate activity with regular resistance training maximizes the benefits of exercise
- Dedicating even 10-20 minutes of time 5 days a week to some kind of movement creates a framework for an active lifestyle
- Cultivating exercise (e.g., walking) in almost all forms of weather/climate creates much greater accessibility and resiliency over time
- Combining prayer with movement provides for both health and spiritual benefits

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St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Pray for Us

# February

## NUTRITION

**St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**

*“Take even bread with moderation, lest a loaded stomach should make you weary of prayer.”*

## PROMISE:

- Eating whole and minimally processed foods is associated with decreased depression and improved mental health
- Vitamins and minerals are co-factors that support conversion of food chemicals (e.g., tryptophan) into neurotransmitters (e.g., serotonin) our brains need
- Increased nutrient consumption has been shown to improve attention, energy, and emotional regulation
- Children of pregnant women with a healthier “gut” had fewer anxious, depressed, and withdrawn behaviors as toddlers

## ACTION STEPS:

- Even a small increase in natural and minimally processed food (e.g., frozen peas) is associated with improved mental health
- Drinking water primarily and consistently supports every system in our body, which is composed of 70+ percent water
- Healthy foods, such as eggs, oatmeal, beans, lentils, bananas and such, are affordable and accessible to purchase
- Cooking at home with natural foods significantly reduces a number of negative health markers

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St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Pray for Us



# March

## ROUTINE/HABIT

***St. Dominic Savio (1842-1857)***

*“Ask Jesus to make you a saint. After all, only He can do that. Go to Confession regularly and Communion as often as you can.”*

## PROMISE

- Regular routines are associated with improved mental health, improved recovery from addiction, and increased happiness and development
- Individuals who engage in regular routines are less prone to various illnesses
- Daily routines decrease chronic stress, which is associated with improved physical outcomes (e.g., reduced risk for heart disease)
- Consistent routines are associated with higher levels of productivity

## ACTION STEPS

- Being very specific/concrete in setting routines (e.g., I will go to bed by 9 PM) is more effective than general ideas (e.g., I want to go to bed earlier)
- Whenever possible, find ways to make habits creative and fun (e.g., using different routes/drills for exercise)
- Recognize that failure is just part of establishing healthy routines. It doesn't signify an end, but rather an opportunity to grow as the acronym FAIL (Forever Attempt In Learning) indicates
- Seek out social support for routines; others can hold us accountable and make habits and routines much more fun

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St. Dominic Savio, Pray for Us

# April

## COMMUNICATION

### *St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)*

*"If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world on fire. Let the truth be your delight – proclaim it, but with a certain congeniality."*

## PROMISE

- Social support is one of the best buffers against depression and other negative psychological/physical outcomes
- Human beings learn best when engaged in social-emotional learning that involves effective communication
- Effective communication is one of the most important factors in sustaining healthy relationships
- Walking while having conversations has been shown to be one of the best ways to resolve conflict and interact around difficult matters

## ACTION STEPS

- Be as clear and concrete as possible. Avoid exaggerations or dramatic statements when talking about important matters (e.g., how we feel)
- Strive to be transparent and honest in what you say. If you make a mistake, acknowledge it. If you are feeling a certain way, communicate it using "I statements" (e.g., I feel \_\_\_\_\_ (emotion) because \_\_\_\_\_). Avoid "you statements" such as accusations or calling names
- When you say something, make sure that you mean what you say. Don't simply make statements that you don't believe or you know aren't true
- Focus on communicating about the situation/circumstance, not making judgements or accusations about the person (e.g., "I feel frustrated because \_\_\_\_\_" instead of "you are \_\_\_\_\_")

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St. Catherine of Siena, Pray for Us



# May

## BALANCE

**St. Philip Neri (1515-1595)**

*"We must not become so attached to the means [of the pursuit of holiness] as to forget the end. We mortify the flesh but we must also mortify the brain, which is the chief means by which we become sinners or saints."*

## PROMISE

- Evidence suggests that when we adhere to the rhythms of life (e.g., sleep, movement, relaxation), we are much healthier and happier
- Using signs of our body, such as emotions, pain, sensations, not to be avoided or squelched, but as informants, creates better opportunities for growth of all kinds
- Avoiding any one facet of life (e.g., work) from demanding almost all our focus opens up opportunities to find joy and meaning in various aspects of life
- Every cell and system in the body depends on homeostasis to remain healthy; when we anchor our days in a balanced manner, it promotes health in all aspects of life

## ACTION STEPS

- It is impossible for every day to be balanced. Thus the focus should be on making sure that key areas of our life, such as sleep, diet, activity, socialization, work, prayer, and silence, are prioritized as a primary focus and not relegated to optional
- Screens/technology as well as other areas, such as sports and work, can drain time needed for more balanced activities. It is important to have regular discussions with loved ones about how schedules can be arranged to support everyone's needs in these areas
- Pursuing holistic health naturally encourages a more balanced life, even in really busy times. Before saying yes to anything, we should closely evaluate how this either supports or detracts from a healthy life
- Maximize options for rest and relaxation while still learning to move as part of it. For example, use vacation days as available at work and even in the busiest of times, make sure time, even small amounts, is prioritized for leisure and relaxation

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St. Philip Neri, Pray for Us

# June

## SILENCE

**St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231)**

*“Whosoever looks into murky and agitated waters cannot see his own countenance. If you want the face of Christ to appear in your countenance, pause, recollect your thoughts in silence, and shut the door of the soul to the noise of exterior things.”*

## PROMISE

- Silence provides for increased opportunities for rest, creativity, discovery, and awareness of our surroundings
- Studies indicate that regular silence leads to hippocampal growth in the brain, thus improving memory
- Just two minutes of silence is associated with positive changes in circulation and blood pressure
- Regular meditation in silence is associated with improved sleep, decreased depression, and reduced fatigue

## ACTION STEPS

- Making sure that our homes have multiple silent sanctuaries improves better access to this as part of our daily life
- Leaving mobile devices behind (or on silent) preserves and enhances positive experiences by ourselves and with others
- Seeking out regular activities (e.g., walking, cooking, gardening) in silence is a great way to prioritize this practice
- Hiking nearby trails or walking in green space in silence better connects us with nature, ourselves, and God

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St. Anthony of Padua, Pray for Us



# July

## DETACHMENT

***St. Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925)***

*“Foolish is he who follows the pleasures of this world, because these are always fleeting and bring much pain. The only true pleasure is that which comes to us through faith.”*

## PROMISE

- Detachment, or intentional solitude, is associated with improved mental health
- Consistent detachment is associated with less chronic fatigue
- Regular solitude is associated with decreased conflict associated with roles/demands at work and home
- Increased creativity, productivity, and curiosity is associated with regular detachment

## ACTION STEPS

- Cultivate an attitude and an approach where regular solitude is important for health, faith, and rejuvenation. Learn to embrace being alone
- Reduce time on social media and internet; have regular periods of time (and days) when screens/internet is not used or available
- If you are feeling overwhelmed by demands of others, communicate the need to take a break, even for a few minutes
- Prioritize development of a relationship with God’s natural world; prioritize time spent outdoors

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Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati, Pray for Us

# August

## ENJOYING NATURE

### ***St. Augustine (354-430)***

*"Some people, to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"*

## PROMISE

- Increased exposure to nature is associated with improved mood and reduced stress and anger
- Improved physical and psychological health is linked to being outdoors
- Exposure to nature is associated with improvement in empathy and cooperation
- Increased time outdoors is associated with improved attention and critical thinking skills

## ACTION STEPS

- Learning to get out in the rain, snow, and other unique weather patterns in a safe, reasonable comfortable manner increases the opportunity to appreciate all natural seasons
- Being part of an outdoor network (e.g., trails coalition, park societies, walking groups, etc.) opens up opportunities for greater camaraderie in the beauty of nature
- Researching natural phenomenon (e.g., library, internet) increases curiosity and awe of God's extraordinary creation
- Finding nearby trails and green space, and spending time getting to know them intimately, increases appreciate of the natural world

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St. Augustine, Pray for Us



# September

## DEVICES

***St. Padre Pio (1887-1968)***

*“Love and practice simplicity and humility, and don’t worry about the opinion of the world, because if the world had nothing to say against us, we would not be real servants of God.”*

## PROMISE

- Having tech-free space/times in our homes (e.g., meals, bedtime) is associated with improved health and relationships
- Decreased social media usage is associated with less anxiety
- Reducing the number of times a mobile device is accessed provides increased opportunities for reflection, “aha moments”, and silence
- Individuals perform better on intellectual tasks, engage better in conversations, recall information more readily when smartphones are not available

## ACTION STEPS

- Charging smartphones outside the bedroom at night is associated with improved sleep and restfulness
- Leaving devices at home or turned off during social and physical activities enhances opportunities for rejuvenation and healthy detachment
- Modeling responsible tech usage is one of the biggest keys in fostering this in our youth
- Reduced usage of mobile devices, especially in non-public areas, significantly decreases likelihood of accessing spiritual vices

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St. Padre Pio, Pray for Us

# October

## SLEEP

**St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)**

*“Jesus has shown me the only way that leads to the fire of divine love: it is that of a little child who, full of trust, falls asleep in its father’s arms.”*

## PROMISE

- Sleep helps repair the body from movement that occurs from the day
- Roughly two-thirds of our growth hormone, which is involved with muscle development, is secreted during sleep
- Sleep helps control when we feel full, and when it is time to eat in order to prepare for the day
- Sleep is involved with regulating our blood sugar to a healthy level
- Studies indicate that going to bed earlier can help make a diet more successful

## ACTION STEPS

- The bedroom should be conducive to sleep. Entertainment and mobile devices in the bedroom don’t create a good sleep environment
- A consistent bedtime/waketime, within an hour window, except in rare circumstances, supports good sleep
- The room should be dark and cool; warm temperatures generally make it more difficult to sleep
- Consistent activity and regular routines during the day (including refraining from technology 30 minutes before bedtime) support sleep onset and maintenance

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St. Therese of Lisieux, Pray for Us

# November

## VIRTUE

**St. Leo the Great (400-461)**

*"Virtue is nothing without the trial of temptation, for there is no conflict without an enemy, no victory without strife."*

## PROMISE

- Improved self-control in childhood is associated with positive outcomes in the following areas as adults: physical health, substance dependence, socioeconomic status, wealth, single- vs. two-parent rearing, financial planfulness/difficulties, and likelihood of criminal conviction
- Reduced chronic wrath/anger is associated with improved cardiac outcomes
- Financial stress is consistently reported as the #1 type of stress indicated by adults
- Reduced greed and increased volunteering is associated with improved psychological outcomes
- Healthy and virtuous sexuality is associated with improved adjustment, relationships, and decreased rates of addiction

## ACTION STEPS

- Praying regularly for not just positive outcomes, but also increased virtuous responding (and processes) is key
- Finding ways to reward self and others consistently for virtuous actions, even when the outcomes aren't as desired, prioritizes growth in this area
- Utilizing and highlighting media for youth and adults that reinforces virtuous actions & processes helps encourage this kind of responding
- Exploring scientific research related to virtue (and the theology associated with it) can help inform possibilities in all aspects of everyday life, not just those seen as expressly religious

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St. Leo the Great, Pray for Us



# December

## LEISURE/REST

**St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109)**

*“Come now, thou poor child of man, turn awhile from thy business, hide thyself for a little time from restless thoughts, cast away thy troublesome cares, put aside thy wearisome distractions. Give thyself a little leisure to converse with God, and take thy rest awhile in Him. Enter into the secret chamber of thy heart: leave everything without but God and what may help thee to seek after Him, and when thou hast shut the door, then do thou seek Him.”*

## PROMISE

- Building in regular, reasonable leisure time is associated with better sleep and creativity, reduced anxiety, increased energy, and increased present-mindedness are benefits of regular leisure
- Engaging in regular leisure time is one key to developing new hobbies
- Those who prioritize leisure time report greater life satisfaction
- Engaging in activities with others and forging connections of support serves as a buffer against many psychological and medical conditions

## ACTION STEPS

- Putting consistent effort into building healthy habits and regular routines improves efficiency that increases available time for leisure
- Writing down (or recording in any manner) stressors for the purposes of reducing rumination, allowing greater opportunities for rest and leisure
- Utilizing resources/strategies to reduce repetitive behaviors (e.g., repeatedly revisiting emails, having the same conversation over & over) opens up much more time for leisure activities
- Reducing financial demands by foregoing “extras” (e.g., new furniture/ car) provides more financial and work flexibility to prioritize leisure
- Prioritizing the cultivation of leisure activities with others provides great opportunities for joy and rejuvenation

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St. Anselm of Canterbury, Pray for Us

We will all suffer at times, and some suffering can facilitate personal growth and greater closeness to God. But so much of the suffering in our world, and our difficulties in finding joy in healthy ways, is because we as people don't understand and/or pursue God's designs in all things. When this occurs, our likelihood for negative outcomes increases and we struggle to sustain joy and peace. But when we pursue God's design in our whole lives and in our world, opportunities to unite with others in joyful ways, and grow closer to Him, become exciting and endless.

*For more information about the mission Living a Whole Christian Life, including Dr. Schroeder's books, articles, and podcast, please visit his website ([james-schroeder.com](http://james-schroeder.com)) and please consider supporting the mission. This can be done by purchasing his books, passing materials along to friends, families, organizations, and connecting with him directly about other ways to provide support. Together, we can find greater happiness, health, and harmony as we strive towards the heavenly banquet.*



