

## Chapter 2.

# SPIRITUAL JOURNEY: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

*“But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

—MATTHEW 7:14

Since I started my journey of trusting and saying yes to God, there has never been a dull moment.

When you decide to join this journey, you will learn that it features more adventure than you could have imagined. The best part? God is looking for men and women in whom He can confide and share the secrets of His heart (Ps. 25:14). He wants you to walk with Him.

Drawing near to God reveals our true motives. We want a formula we can easily use to get close to God. We want the version of relationship heard about on TV that if we give our lives to God, then we will be rich and successful. All our problems will fade away and everything will be great! This version of relationship focuses on what we get from the relationship, rather than who we are with on the journey. The spiritual journey is not what we do or don't do for God. The spiritual journey is about traveling with the One we love

to experience life together within each present moment. Our love for each other is deepened as we travel and we begin to catch a glimpse of our purpose for existence. We walk at our own pace to take in the view along the way, whether engaging in great conversation or silently embracing the beauty of creation. Each experience is something to be cherished as unique to our journey as each day unfolds.

## **BARRIERS ALONG THE WAY**

At times, there are hills, boulders, cliffs, fallen trees, or annoying people who block our way. Only passion and perseverance provide inspiration to keep moving and remove obstacles. Temptation to quit is a common part of the journey, as weather

conditions, length of the daily walk, sore muscles, aching feet, blisters, and rashes appear at the most unexpected times and places. Only travelers who value the relationship keep going, because only those who want more of God get more of God.

Some people like the idea of the journey, but don't want to put in the needed effort to train or get in shape for it. They just want to say they did the trek, not embrace every aspect of it as an equal part of the whole. Pain and joy are equally necessary companions found on the journey. You can experience both at the same time, and their presence often reveals wounded places in our soul that need time and attention for healing. The spiritual journey is a pathway available for anyone to join, but it is not for the faint of heart.

God desires to have a personal relationship with us, but wants us to choose intimacy with Him in return. God did not seek to have an intimate relationship with anything else he created, because no other part of creation had the capacity to love. We were created with the capacity to love deeper and deeper and deeper through relationship. We love because God first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). We desire because God first desired us. We seek God because He first sought after us. Awareness of love is not sufficient. We were created for loving intimacy, which is a response to the whispers of longing put in our hearts by our Creator. We have been created first and foremost to receive the love of God and in turn love Him back through relational intimacy.

## JOURNEY VS. DESTINATION

Your spiritual journey starts with intentional seeking of God. This journey is fluid and takes as long as necessary. There is no set destination on earth, only an assurance to be with God when our time here is over. The biggest blessing is what you see and experience along the way.

Spiritual pilgrimages are mankind's attempt to get close to God. By going to physical, sacred places as an act of religious devotion, we try to find a way to connect with God at a location or place believed to be holy. Mecca, Vatican City, Lourdes, Camino de Santiago, Char Dham, Tibet, and Israel are places where people make spiritual pilgrimages to meet God. Mankind is always seeking, but God is always

drawing. Apart from God drawing us to Himself, we wander. The journey of spiritual formation is an intentional choice to draw near to God and become like Jesus. The apostle Paul spoke of God's intentionality to create within each of us a desire to seek God when he spoke,

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. *God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*, though he is not far from any one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:26-28a, italics mine)

God wants to be found by us. Jeremiah records, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD" (Jer. 29:13-14a).

My father used to say, "You're as close to God as you wanna be." I think he said that to motivate me, but instead it struck fear in my heart that I could be closer and needed to try harder to do more for God to show Him I meant business. I interpreted the "could be closer" as "should be closer," so you "better get closer," rather than realize that God is the One who draws us in and His love is what keeps us close.

## FOUR TYPES OF PEOPLE ON THE JOURNEY

You and I will meet various people on our journey. The first type of person on the spiritual journey is the theoretician, who is knowledgeable in theology and doctrine of many traditions. This person is very rules-oriented and law-abiding, believing that outward behavior is critical for acceptance by God. Relationship with God is more of a contract than a love relationship. The theoretician recognizes his need for God and decides to follow Him by believing the right thing and doing all that is expected. The theoretician has relationship from his head, whereby he hears truth, makes a decision to follow, and acts

according to the system of that religion. The theoretician leans toward legalism because of its ease of application. Obedience to follow all rules will be followed without resistance.

The second type of person on the journey is the diagnostician, who judges others who do not know God the way he or she does. Personal experience, not the Bible, is the standard by which others are accepted or rejected. Arguments are a common occurrence with the diagnostician, because everything is based on personal opinion and must pass through the grid of his or her personal experience. Theological and doctrinal beliefs are shallow, or non-existent, because the focus is about following God *their* way. No other way is acceptable.

The third type of person on the journey is the observer, who is open to ask the question, “Is this God?” Style and form are not rigid; rather, there is an openness to find out if what is happening could be God’s presence. This observer is looking for a relationship with God that surpasses duty and right behavior by adhering to a set of rules, and longs for love and affirmation with God and others. The observer is drawn by the attitude of others on the journey who are in love with God. The curiosity and hope that such a peace could be attained is attractive to the observer. There is a willingness to see if such behaviors and practices are helpful and pique the interest of the observer to search the Bible for answers and examples of such people and actions. The heart of the observer is open to be drawn into a deeper relationship with

God like the psalmist who said, “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths” (Ps. 25:4).

The fourth type of person on the journey is the practitioner. This person is open to trying new things, with the singular goal of intimacy with God. The practitioner is willing to try new ways of reading the Bible, prayer, and meditation to draw near to God. Suspicion and skepticism are not a part of the practitioner’s mindset, because his or her relationship with God is already strong. Hunger for more of God causes this person to desire more of Him. Books, mentors, podcasts, sermon series, and Bible studies are all open avenues for growth and learning. The practitioner’s posture is open and yielded to instruction by men and women of faith who are grounded in their beliefs about God.

***Mirror Moment***

Which one or two of these people on the journey do you tend to be like? Theoretician, diagnostician, observer, practitioner? Explain.

Would you be willing to try new things in your relationship with God as we begin this journey together? Your worldview will be stretched as you encounter new things.

giving God space in our lives to help us become like Jesus from the inside out to reflect the character of God, form a people of God, and participate in God's reconciling plan with mankind.<sup>1</sup> God's part is to do the work. Our part is to give God space in our lives to do His work. We are changed at regeneration, which is why it is called the new birth, but we must choose to cooperate with God in the ongoing process. Kingdom living necessitates intention, effort, and even occasional difficulty, which is why spiritual formation is both a formal and informal process of giving God space in our lives. It occurs in formal training times like listening to sermons, reading books, and taking classes as well as through informal times of personal devotion, prayer, and conversations with friends. God brings opportunities for us to choose whether or not we

**DEFINITION OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

Our working definition of spiritual formation is the intentional formal and informal process of

will step into those moments to be changed a little more.

Our reflection of God (*imago Dei*), our formation through the church (ecclesiology), and our participation in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) give us purpose on the spiritual journey. Made in His image as the people of God, we have a unique mission to fulfill with Him to bring others back into relationship with Him. By giving God space in our lives, we become like another person. Our formation is not a set of rules and regulations to follow; rather, it is a process of becoming like another person through time spent together on the journey. We follow the person of Jesus, and through the development of our unique relationship on the spiritual journey, we begin to look, sound, and act like Him through

the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### Imago Dei

The first purpose of spiritual formation was to make us aware that we reflect the character of God as children made in His image. This is called *imago Dei*. God wants us to love Him in return and have deep fellowship with Him, but without love as the motivation, our relationship becomes obligatory. Dutiful relationships quickly become dull, predictable, and lifeless. Our eyes shift from loving Jesus to working for Jesus. And moving from relationship to religion. A love relationship never loses sight of the lover.

In our love relationship with God, we “find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph. 5:10). Such

intentionality is exactly what happens in loving earthly relationships as well. Looking, watching, listening, asking, and noticing what pleases the other person is always on our minds because we want to go beyond saying we love them to showing we love them with our actions. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love” (Jn. 15:10).

Religion, on the other hand, is based on image and following the rules. It focuses on what a person does or does not do to earn God’s love and approval, not realizing that we can never earn our salvation because Jesus already paid the price in full for our redemption (Heb. 10:10). As C. S. Lewis explains,

Religion opens us to new possibilities of both good and evil. From that point on the road branches: one way leads to sanctity, humility, the other to spiritual pride, self-righteousness, and persecuting zeal. There is simply no way back to the mere humdrum virtues of the unawakened soul. If the Divine does not make us better, it will make us very much worse. Of all the bad men, religious bad men are the worst.<sup>2</sup>

As we respond in loving relationship to an all-powerful God who is at work in us, we have both the desire and power to do what pleases Him. God is not opposed to effort, as He tells us to “do everything with all our might and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eccl. 9:10 and Col. 3:17). However, He is saying that our effort does not earn

us more of God's approval and acceptance. God already loves us fully and completely in Christ and "we can only receive this gift by grace through faith" (Eph. 2:8).

James Ryle, one of the founding board members of Promise Keepers, defined grace as "the empowering presence of God enabling us to be all we were created to be and to do all we were created to do."<sup>3</sup> This definition puts the emphasis back on God's empowering presence as the source of our spiritual formation, not our effort. Made in the image of God, our lives are still broken and in need of our identity to be established in Christ through intimacy with Him. As we seek to become like Jesus, then we begin to reflect the character of God in our lives.

## Ecclesiology

The second purpose of spiritual formation is to form a people of God. Spiritual formation is not meant to be done in isolation. In the Shema, it is clearly written that there is only one true God and He alone is to be loved (Deut 6:4–9). This was expanded by Jesus in Luke 10:27 when He adds, "And love your neighbor as yourself." This explicit inclusion of loving others is the introduction to missions, as it eliminates mankind's temptation to see religion as purely devotion to God. True growth can only occur as mankind is in relationship with one another. Theologian Darrell Guder rightly says,

The centrality of the community to the gospel means that the message is never disembodied. The word must always become flesh, embodied in the life of the called community. The gospel cannot be captured adequately in propositions, or creeds, or theological systems, as crucial as all of these exercises are. The gospel dwells in and shapes the people who are called to be its witness. The message is inextricably linked with its messengers.<sup>4</sup>

Our lives must speak louder than our words, since we are the representatives of the gospel message. Community fosters a sense of belonging, which is vital for accountability, fellowship, and healing. In true community, it is safe to share struggles with sin in order to receive encouragement and help in our relationship with

Jesus. Belonging is very important in the body of Christ, and people must be able to come as they are to meet Jesus. God gave the church “gifts of leadership through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–13) to be united in faith and mature in the Lord. God also intended “the church to be the manifold wisdom of God to make known the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10), which is what we know as spiritual warfare. The church then “makes disciples of all nations baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded” (Matt. 28:18–20). As the heart of God flows to the people of God, our performance and programs flow out of this relationship. This causes

a deepened love for God and compels us to tell others about this loving God.

Spiritual formation flows best in the Community of the Beloved. Accountability, fellowship, healing, and community take place in this environment. People cannot hide when there is true fellowship, because there is vulnerability, honesty, and transparency regarding our personal brokenness. There is the recognition that healing comes through the body of Christ as we allow ourselves to be held accountable by others. This is not saying that we are to live with no boundaries; rather, it is an invitation to deep fellowship as we walk the journey of faith together. Reconciliation must always be on our heart to bring others back into relationship with God. This message of

reconciliation makes us Christ's ambassadors (II Cor. 5:18-20).

### Missio Dei

The third purpose of spiritual formation is to participate in God's reconciling plan with mankind. As the church, we are to be in the world, but not of the world to bring people to a relationship with Jesus Christ. The longer we are Christians, the fewer friends we have who don't know Christ. Part of this is due to our fear that the world will taint us.

According to M. Scott Peck, the two vices of fear and laziness lay at the very heart of sin. "Fear will keep us from practicing presence and proximity with non-Christian people, and laziness will keep us from regularly being in their

world.”<sup>5</sup> It is important for us to realize that our mission is simply to participate in God's mission incarnationally.

*Missio Dei* is the term used to describe the mission of God. As the church, we simply follow where God is leading us. Christopher Wright, in his book *The Mission of God*, writes of our relationship with God's mission.

Fundamentally, our mission ... means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.<sup>6</sup>

God's mission is not simply to restore man's relationship with Him, but to also restore creation. Adam's fall affected the whole of creation, and the

second Adam's redemption affects the whole of creation.

Prayer is a major way in which we participate in God's reconciling plan with mankind. We must seek the Lord to find out what He desires us to do. Prayer is the agency whereby God extends His kingdom, defeats Satan, and fulfills His plan upon the Earth. The Trinity is actively involved in fulfilling the will of the Father through prayer. As the children of God, we come to the Father to pray and ask for His direction, guidance, wisdom, will, purpose, or plan. The Trinity works in us to fulfill the will of the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. “For the disciple of Jesus, this stage of discipleship is not the first step toward a promising career. It is in itself the fulfillment of his destiny.”<sup>7</sup>

## LOVE SEEKS ATTACHMENT

Our desire for God was  
put there by Him.

Our desire for God was put there by Him. Isaiah wrote, “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you” (Is. 26:9). The psalmist wrote, “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord,” (Ps. 84:2) and “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you.” (Ps. 63:1). Catherine LaCugna, Catholic theologian, explained God’s yearning for us when she wrote,

The deep yearning and desire for God we find inscribed in our hearts is more intelligible if that desire is rooted in the very nature of God, that is, if God, too yearns for and desires another, not out of need or lack, but out of plenitude of love... Love seeks attachment and affiliation, never fragmentation, solitariness, or autonomy. Divine self-sufficiency is exposed as a philosophical myth.<sup>8</sup>

In this view, God is attuned to and desires relationship with us. God wants to be close to us and is intricately involved in every detail of our lives. This is the definition of theism. He is not a god who set the world into motion, then left it to the natural laws of nature. That is deism. There are many Christians today who say they are theists, but live like deists, with no evidence

of God's detailed involvement in their lives. In the evangelical church, it is preached that we have been made for God's purpose and He will mightily use us. No one wants to be used. We want and need to be loved. This journey of spiritual formation starts with love, because God is love (1 Jn. 4:8), and we love because He first loved us (v. 19). If love seeks attachment and affiliation, God created us primarily for love.

In all religions, man is seeking God, but Christianity is the only religion where God came to man. Jesus came to Earth and became a human being to show us the way to have relationship with God in a very personal way. Jesus is the exact representation of the Father (Heb. 1:3), and since He died to pay for our sin, this gave us the opportunity to come back into relationship with

the Father; we simply accept His invitation to join Him on this journey of relationship.

### ***Mirror Moment***

If and when you are ready, pray this prayer of intention.

**Prayer: God, this is good news that you created me to have a love relationship with you. I want to do that, but I don't know how. I say yes to you and accept your offer to help me know you. Amen.**

### **OBSTACLE: FEAR OF REJECTION**

Hiding is common when it comes to relationships because it must first be determined if

it is safe to really be ourselves. Do others want to know the real me? Can they handle knowing the real me? Will they accept the real me? Should I just play it safe and be superficial? I can be nice to them, smile, wave, hang out with them, laugh, and get pizza together, but will I ever let them know who I really am?

I once saw a book titled, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* I thought the answer was obvious. I am afraid to tell anyone who I am for fear of rejection. What you see is what you get, and if I am rejected, the result is being alone. The possibility of rejection is enough to put on a happy face and go with the flow. The decision is made to have no opinion about anything and let the other person choose the movie, type of food we eat, where we go, and what we do. Choosing

agreement at all costs is the secret mantra of the person who fears rejection. The classic answer of such a person when asked anything is, "I don't know." The conclusion that coming off easygoing is much better than the risk of being known deflects all potential conflict or disagreement. It is not uncommon that over time, a slight depression will set in because of the incongruence. It takes far more energy to try to please others than to be known. What is the worst thing that could happen if you are known? Yes, rejection, but pretending is so tiring.

It takes time to decide one's viewpoint. Living so long without acknowledging thoughts and feelings requires time and space to discover what is there. Admitting it, naming it, and speaking it out loud will be another step to face the risk of

rejection. It is in the very act of stating an opinion that self-discovery is found. Daring to say what we think indicates that we deem ourselves worthy to contribute to the conversation. A change of mind is also part of the process. Determining what we don't want is as crucial as determining what we do want.

Becoming friends with yourself is highly recommended before becoming friends with someone else. Lack of self-knowledge and acceptance leaves us open to taking on whatever persona is around, trying to get the acceptance we desperately long for as well as keeping the rejection monster from swallowing us alive and making our worst fears become reality. Differing from someone else is a good thing because it brings many facets to a situation to cover all angles. It is

quickly learned that our particular way of seeing things is valuable to those around us.

## REACH FOR THE MASK

Fear of rejection resides in all of us, causing us to pick up a mask to hide our real self. We are guarded in our conversations, always do the right thing, keep all the rules, and outwardly appear to be people of integrity, when just the opposite is the case. We have concluded that being ourselves is not enough, so we pretend to be what other people want or need. We are chameleons who change with the crowd as often as necessary to belong. We don't know who we are, because we have spent our lives reading a room or situation and adapting to our surroundings. We have no sense of identity

because our worth is dependent on someone else's determination. We call it flexibility, when in reality it's fickleness. We have learned early on that pleasing others gets attention, approval, affirmation, and significance, so we lay aside our own needs to fit the part. We know how to perform, what to say, how to say it, when to appear, and when to stay away to conform to the need of the moment. We are praised for our selflessness, friendship, and loyalty, when we are really just afraid to disagree or put forward our own opinion. We truly don't know what we personally think, because we have spent our entire life trying to please someone else.

There is a deep sense of loneliness for us when we hide our true selves. Why? The mask is what receives the attention or affirmation. Who

we really are doesn't seem to be enough. Instead of recognizing that we have things to offer that others need, we hide and a false self is created. Once the false self starts receiving praise, it seals the persona, because now there is a risk of exposure as a fraud if the real us is revealed. There is nothing wrong with feeling special, but our false self has an attachment to an image that is not true. The problem with the false self is that it works. We forget the vulnerable, small self and take on a bigger, more powerful self that makes us feel valuable, worthwhile, and important. We need to realize that God doesn't love the mask. He loves me. Naked. Me. He doesn't love my appearance, accomplishments, or performance. He loves me. Broken, needy me. And nothing can ever separate me from His love (Rom. 8:39). It is a vulnerable

thing to be true to myself, but there is freedom in my honesty.

### ***Mirror Moment***

Take a moment and think about when you started wearing your mask. How old were you? What happened for you to decide you needed the mask? Now gather materials to make a mask. It can be as elaborate or simple as you choose. The outside portrays how people see you, and the inside portrays how you see yourself. Be honest with what is really there.

## **THE WAY THROUGH: OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**

Spiritual disciplines are like different modes of transportation we use for different trips. Sometimes we choose to walk, ride a bike, ride a motorcycle, or fly in an airplane. Our working definition of spiritual disciplines is a means of grace to make space for God's presence in our lives. In essence, we are saying we are going to remove all distractions occupying our focus so we can give our attention to God. Spiritual disciplines are not a current Christian fad. These disciplines are centuries old and were practiced in the life of Jesus, His disciples, and fellow travelers throughout church history.

Spiritual disciplines are not a checklist to mark off after completion. When we embrace a spiritual discipline and God's presence invades our moment, we linger in that place and allow the Lord to fill us, cleanse us, renew us, encourage us, comfort us, teach us, or correct us. The point of the discipline is to encounter His presence. There is no need to rush or hurry through an assignment. Being with Him is the focus, so when He shows up, we linger there with him.

Spiritual disciplines are not a means of forcing God's hand. For example, some people think that fasting is a way to prove to God how much they love Him, thus forcing Him to do what they want. God will not be held hostage by our immaturity. He doesn't owe us anything just because we go without food. Spiritual disciplines exist to help us

make room for the presence of God in our lives so we can figure out what He wants for our lives.

Richard Foster wrote,

When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization: inner righteousness is a gift of God to be graciously received. The needed change within us is God's work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given.<sup>9</sup>

God is the One who changes us; we simply say yes to His promptings and are empowered by His

Spirit to be able to change. The spiritual disciplines are the tools by which we make space for God.

Dallas Willard first named the spiritual disciplines of abstinence and spiritual disciplines of engagement, which help us remove barriers that block our connection to God and include practices that nurture our connection to God.<sup>10</sup> In this book, I focus primarily on a few disciplines of abstinence and have taken the liberty to call things spiritual disciplines that are not considered such in the traditional sense. I have done this to introduce new sojourners to the ease of connection with God as we make room for Him in our lives and schedules.<sup>11</sup>

## Spiritual Disciplines of Abstinence (Withholding)

The disciplines of abstinence are the means by which we say no to certain things so we can say yes to God. Chastity is the discipline of saying no to sex for a certain period of time, even as a married person, so not to be controlled by it. Celibacy is the permanent choice to live a chaste lifestyle. The discipline of fasting refrains from food or water for a certain length of time for spiritual purposes. Frugality is using little money to do things inexpensively. It differs from sacrifice, in that a person practicing sacrifice has money or wealth and chooses to give that up to please God. Martyrdom is being willing to die for Christ. Poverty is choosing not to own things. Secrecy is

choosing not to let others know the good deeds you do for others. Submission is giving up control. Simplicity is giving up what complicates your life so you can focus more fully on the Lord.

At times, it's obvious what God is speaking to us and at other times, it lacks clarity. His various styles of communication cause us to listen with an intentionality we might otherwise miss. It is a very slow process, but the deeper we go in intimacy, the greater the revelation of unknown entanglements of our heart to other things. The disciplines of solitude, silence, and stillness are disciplines of abstinence which make room for God in very purposeful ways.

### *Solitude*

Solitude is the practice of saying no to noise,

busyness, hurry, and community to come to God alone for what you need. I am all for community, but there are times when we try to get from other people what we need to get from God alone. Extroverts who get fed by being with people will have times in their lives when the Lord will ask them to come away with Him and fast from people, noise, busyness, and activity to be alone in His presence. There is something about solitude that allows us to focus on His purpose and His way. It is hard to find places to be alone, but it is vital for our growth. Jesus often practiced solitude. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mk. 1:35). Getting away from the crowd and all the voices to hear the One Voice puts things in perspective.

### *Silence*

The discipline of silence can be part of the solitude activity. It is a discipline that fasts from noise and words, with the intention of better hearing the voice of God. Vows of silence are a common part of monastic and Franciscan traditions, and with the quickening pace and constant barrage of stimulation from electronics, it is a wise practice to withdraw to the quiet to focus on God. The discipline of silence includes moving to silent places as well as refraining from speaking.

Jesus, you are my healer.

Contemplation or centering prayer often flows out of silence and solitude, but it is a different kind of prayer than found in evangelical traditions. Petitioning God with needs and requests requires explaining ourselves, but centering prayer focuses on God. It almost seems like a pointless exercise, but its goal is to come to God without any agenda, list, or request, simply to gaze upon His beauty (Ps. 27:4) with a repetitive word or phrase. Phrases can be spoken with the rhythm of one's breathing with two syllables spoken upon inhalation and five syllables spoken upon exhalation. "Jesus" (breathing in), "I trust you alone" (breathing out). Another phrase is, "Abba, I belong to you. Jesus, you are my healer. Father, my hope is in you."

The beauty of this simple exercise is that it requires us to slow down. Even if we come into God's presence frazzled, it helps us calm down as we slowly and deliberately say these phrases. It is important to use meaningful phrases fitting to us as we engage in this new practice.

Repetition of declarative truth is powerful. Time is needed for us to unwind, but done as a repeated practice, it helps us center on the One who is in charge and loves us as we are. We see the power of the angels' repetition whose sole purpose in Revelation 4:8 is to repeat the phrase, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." This is not a mindless chant; rather, it is an intentional act of worship to humbly adore the Worthy One. Making room in our lives to do the same centers us on Him.

Our tendency is to make our time with God productive by moving quickly from enjoying the presence of the Lord to how God can use us. We must avoid this temptation to come to get to give. We start out coming to God for ourselves, but soon realize that what we are reading or learning would make a good sermon or teaching point for a class we teach. We easily cross the line from personal intimacy to job mode in a very short period of time.

Jeanne Guyon wrote,

Let us say your mind begins to wander. Once you have been deeply touched by the Lord's Spirit and are distracted, be diligent to bring your wandering mind back to the Lord. This is the easiest way in the world to overcome external distractions.<sup>12</sup>

It is normal for our minds to wander, but we must choose to return our attention to the presence of the Lord. God doesn't want something from us. He simply wants us. God desires our wholehearted love and affection. Guyon continues,

Then, how will you treat suffering? Or, to put it another way, how do you respond to the Lord's working of the cross in your life? You respond this way. As soon as anything comes to you in the form of suffering, at that very moment a natural resistance will well up somewhere inside you. When that moment comes, immediately resign yourself to God. *Accept the matter.* In that moment give yourself up to Him as a sacrifice.<sup>12</sup>

It will not come easily for us to sit silently and do nothing, which is precisely why it is called a discipline.

### *Stillness*

I am adding stillness as a spiritual discipline because many people do not make time for it. They meet God in the shower, in the car, or while cleaning the house. Whichever place you meet the Lord is a great place, *but* there is something powerful about intentionally coming into the presence of the Lord and not multitasking. To sit or lie in one place fully awake and focusing on the Lord opens the door to realize our fear that God might not show up. When we come alone into the presence of the Lord quiet and still, there can be immediate discomfort with the silence and the

stillness. Unresolved emotional pain kept at bay while busy now surfaces. Thoughts like, “Is this doing any good? What am I waiting for anyway? What is the point? Am I doing this right? Am I supposed to feel something? What do I think about during this time? How long am I supposed to stay here doing nothing?” And the list goes on and on. These thoughts have to be reined in, which is why the phrases of centering prayer combined with breathing are helpful. A simple prayer like, “Come, Holy Spirit” is a beautiful way to welcome His presence and open our hearts to Him.

### ***Mirror Moment***

Find a comfortable, quiet place and set a timer for eight minutes. Remove all possible distractions, close your eyes, and ask the Holy

Spirit to come. You can do the breathing exercise with a phrase that helps you focus on God, or just be still. When the timer goes off, write in your journal what you saw, sensed, heard, or felt during this time of stillness. Don't feel bad if nothing happened. This is where the discipline part comes in. Just keep showing up and God will meet you. Jesus promises, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn. 14:18). Waiting is one of the hardest things to do, but it is a normal part of the spiritual journey.

### **Spiritual Disciplines of Engagement (Connection)**

Once we become familiar with solitude, silence,

and stillness before God, spiritual disciplines of engagement are added to deepen the connection. Practices such as Bible reading, meditation, Scripture memorization, prayer, and worship help us reinforce biblical truths on which people of faith have relied throughout church history. These practices require an openness to understanding and embracing a life of faith as new ways of living counter our paradigm. Self-reliance falls by the wayside as we move away from being our own god to relying upon another to lead us and care for us. Disciplines of engagement are a more traditional means of connecting with God which many people of faith have experienced in their upbringing, regardless of their religion or church denomination.

Bible reading opens us up to hear from God in a way that pilgrims for centuries have heard the voice of God. Meditation is a conscious focus on small portions of the Bible to ingest their meaning and apply them to your life. The Bible encourages us to “keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8). Choosing to commit verses to memory provides a weapon against lies by retrieving truth during trying times. Prayer is opening the door to let Jesus in and talk with us providing direction and guidance for our lives. Worship is purposeful devotion to someone to whom we give our time, attention, and money. Participating in these spiritual disciplines of engagement makes room for us to connect with God.

[Practice: Reading the Bible](#)

There is plenty of reading material in publication today with differing views on anything we want to know. Reading the Bible is God's perspective and plan for the people on the journey to know who He is, who they are, and how He wants them to live. The Holy Spirit illuminates Scripture to us when we read, so we can understand its meaning and apply it to our lives. There are now phone apps for Bible readings, daily verses, prayer, and devotionals, which you may find helpful. It is also good to have a hard copy Bible so you can see the words in print, underline or highlight areas, and take notes in the margins.

A Bible reading program can be helpful to read different parts of the Bible simultaneously to see

the overarching themes of the Bible. One method that is helpful for a themed approach is to daily read one chapter from Psalms, one chapter from Proverbs, one chapter from the Old Testament (starting with Genesis), and one chapter from the New Testament (starting with Matthew). Some people read through the entire Bible every year and use a different translation so there is a freshness to the reading. The goal of Bible reading is to encounter the presence of God, so the length of reading is not as important as connecting with Him.

A system or method of reading is a good way to work your way through the Bible, but in your daily reading, when you experience God, stop right there, linger in His presence, and enjoy what He is saying to you through His word. You can read

the verses multiple times, close your eyes, and repeat a phrase that stands out to you. Pray that phrase or verse(s) back to the Lord and tell Him you understand what He is trying to say to you. Depending on the length of time you take to linger, that may be enough for one day. If you have time, you may keep reading until something else stands out to you, and linger in the Lord's presence as previously mentioned. God wants you to understand what He's saying to you. Make room for Him and give time to reading His words.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What is your family's background of spirituality, and where are you on the journey?*

2. *Are the people, places, and habits in your life helping or hindering your relationship with God? Explain. Share what you wrote in this Mirror Moment.*
3. *What do you think or feel when you read that God desires to have relationship with you?*
4. *Which type(s) of people on the journey are you: (theoretician, diagnostician, observer, practitioner? Explain.*
5. *How does the fear of rejection play a role in your life?*
6. *In what way(s) do your feelings of worth affect your relationships?*
7. *Share with your group the mask you made during your mirror moment. Start with the outside, then move to the inside. It may be*

*helpful for you to share the one thing you hope no one ever finds out about you, because this is the place where your feelings of worth are hooked. Speaking the truth releases that hold on you and allows the grace and love of God through others to be extended to you.*

<sup>1</sup> Wanda Walborn, doctoral dissertation on “A Mixed Methods Study of Spiritual Formation: The Degree of Change in Grit and Attachment to God Among Ethnically Diverse Students at Nyack College,” April 2015.

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms: The Celebrated Musings on One of the Most Intriguing Books of the Bible* (Orlando: Harvest Books, 1958), 32.

<sup>3</sup> James Ryle, “God’s Grace,” sermon, Nyack College, Fall 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Scott M. Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Touchstone, 1985), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 22–23.

<sup>7</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 353.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> See the written works of the following people to take you deeper into spiritual disciplines and practices: St.