

# 8 Week Spiritual Kick-Start

Adapted and edited from *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL p 264ff.

## **Week 1:**

**Designed to Worship:**  
*exploring the purpose of spiritual disciplines*

## **Week 2:**

**Worship: Valuing the Right Stuff**  
*practices that address the most important thing in life*

## **Week 3:**

**Openness to a God You Can't Control**  
*practices that let the light in*

## **Week 4:**

**Relinquishment: Letting Go in a World Dedicated to Accumulation**  
*practices that lead to authenticity and surrender*

## **Week 5:**

**Sharing Your Life in a Culture Designed for Privacy**  
*practices that lead us to interdependence and community*

## **Week 6:**

**Hearing from God**  
*practices that form the mind of Christ in us*

## **Week 7:**

**Incarnating Jesus**  
*practices that let us be Jesus to the world*

## **Week 8:**

**Praying My Life**  
*practices that lead me to pray without ceasing*

# Week 1

## Designed to Worship

Have you ever been through a spiritually “dry” period of your life? Maybe you are in one right now.

Have you ever asked, “Does God’s presence in me really change anything?”  
What about, “Why don’t I get something out of all that reading?”  
Or, “Is spiritual dryness a permanent state?”

**This study is designed to introduce you to two ancient spiritual practices each week that will help you try to make sense of the intersection between the Bible and real life.**

The Bible is full of real people with real emotions and real problems / challenges / issues. Ron Tappy, Professor of Archaeology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, is convinced after years of study that human nature has not changed all that much in the past 6,000 years. So the stories we read about in the Bible and the people we meet in the pages of Scripture are just as real and relevant to us today as they were when the events happened.

Yet knowing all the information we discover in the Bible and understanding all the events of Scripture are not the end in itself. Rather, it all points to the real life-changing force and the real power behind the words – Jesus Christ.

**Discovering and understanding and experiencing your relationship with Jesus in new, deeper ways is the ultimate goal of this 8 Week Spiritual Kickstart.** This journey is part of an ongoing process by which you will grow closer to Jesus, be more open to His voice, learn to change habits that hinder your ability to live the life Jesus intends for you, and become the person that God designed you to be.

Steven Curtis Chapman wrote the following in his song *The Great Adventure*,

*Come on get ready for the ride of your life.  
Gonna leave long-faced religion in a cloud of dust behind.  
Discover all the new horizons just waiting to be explored  
This is what we were created for  
This is the great adventure*

So get ready for the ride of your life.

**What is it you want Jesus to do?** The first thing Jesus asked his soon-to-be disciples was, “What do you want?” (John 1:37). Over and over again he asked about desires: “What is it you want?” (Matthew 20:21) “What do you want me to do for you?” (Matthew 20:32; Mark 10:36,51) “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6)

As we begin, look at the following verses that express people’s desires for Jesus to do something for them.

Mark 1:40 “A man with leprosy . . . begged (Jesus), . . . ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Matthew 8:34 “They pleaded with (Jesus) to leave their region.”

Matthew 8:25 “Save us! We’re going to drown!”

Matthew 20:21 “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left.”

John 4:15 “Sir, give me this water.”

Mark 9:22 “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

Mark 5:18 “The man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with (Jesus).”

Luke 11:1 “Lord, teach us to pray.”

How comfortable are you approaching Jesus with these kind of questions?

**Take some time this week to get ready for the adventure by reflecting on the following verses.** Take one verse a day from the list below and read it several times throughout the day to help you understand that God designed you to worship Him and wants a relationship with you.

*Matthew 11:28* “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

*John 10:10* “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

*Ephesians 2:4* “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. . .”

*Romans 12:1* “. . . offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

*Romans 12:2* “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

*Ephesians 2:13* “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

*Hebrews 3:7-8* “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts . . .”

## Week 2

# Worship: Valuing the Right Stuff

Human beings are made for worship. Everyone worships someone or something. Human beings cannot help but assign ultimate value and worth to someone or something. Of course, that doesn't mean everyone worships God. One's ultimate devotion can rest in money, success, a person, a garden, a creed, a cause and so forth. Ultimately what we are devoted to will shape our lives.

Many of us are devoted to the same things our culture worships: houses, money, retirement plans, vacations, comforts, success. In and of themselves none of these things is bad. But when we value these things more than we value God, we end up worshipping secondary things. Secondary things can never satisfy core longings. Only a love relationship with our Creator can do that.

The following spiritual disciplines can help you re-focus your worship on what really matters, the only thing that matters – God Almighty.

# *Celebration*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Where are you most prone to celebrate God? Alone? With others? In worship? In music? In nature? What does this tell you about how God made you and how you most naturally meet with him?
2. How is your celebration enhanced or curtailed by your ability to remember the past, live in the moment or anticipate the future?
3. When you see others celebrating God in a way that is new or foreign to you, what goes on in your mind and heart?
4. If there is a heaviness about you, an overly serious side or an entrenched critical spirit, how might celebrating God affect these traits and move you into new areas of transformation?
5. Who do you know who really celebrates life and God?
6. What attracts you to them?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Identify the place you most readily connect with God. Is it in nature? listening to Christian music? participating in corporate worship? solitude? Go to that place. What do you want to tell God about the joy you receive there?
2. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recall all of God's gifts, provisions, guidance and love toward you. To celebrate God's grace to you, write a song of celebration, make a collage that represents your joy, write a poem of praise, play music and dance before the Lord, or memorize a verse of praise and repeat it all through the coming days.
3. Familiarize yourself with the church calendar. Consider ways you can go all-out in your celebration of Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany and All Saints day this year. Plan a way of celebrating God alone or with friends.
4. Consider how God loves you. Read Zephaniah 3:17. Then be still and listen. How is God celebrating you? Celebrate the God who celebrates you. Intentionally ask for the gift of appreciating yourself the way God does.

# *Sabbath*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. What difficulties or compulsions surround your resting on the Sabbath?
2. How does taking a Sabbath enhance your enjoyment and worship of God?
3. What makes a Sabbath day nourishing and replenishing to you?
4. What happens to you when you go without regular rhythms that allow you to rest in God?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Plan a twenty-four-hour Sabbath you can enter with anticipation. The night before your Sabbath, remind your body how long it has to luxuriate and rest in God. Consider the things that would nourish you: worship, music, a nap, walking, reading, playing with children, afternoon tea. Plan them spaciously into the day.
2. Gather your family together to discuss how to arrange your Sabbath for refreshment, renewal and relationships. Ask “How do you intentionally leave the school and work week behind? Let everyone tell one thing they love to do on Sunday. Share what makes Sundays difficult for you. If getting to church is a hurried time that brings distress to the family, spend some time talking together about how to take the pressure off “getting out the door on time.” Should you consider going to church at another time? Would the family enjoy having Dad fix breakfast? Would they rather just drink juice and share a family brunch? What can be done the night before to make it easier to get going in the morning? How can you approach sabbaths in ways that do not force, rush or demand?
3. Begin your sabbath gently on Saturday evening. Light a candle. Invite the presence of Christ to guide you through your Sabbath. Eat with friends and family. Pray for Christ to give you deep, refreshing rest.
4. Prepare a “Sabbath box or basket.” Choose a basket or cover a grocery size box with gift-wrapping paper. Each Saturday evening, gather as a family to put all the things you don’t need to take with you into Sunday. Drop cell phones, credit cards, video games, work projects, homework, etc. into the box. Tell one another what you are looking forward to on Sunday. Pray together to receive the gift of Sabbath.

## Week 3

# Openness to a God You Can't Control

Noticing when someone shows up for us is an important part of developing a relationship. But the truth is we can become so preoccupied with all we have to do that we look right through people and neglect even those we love. Being open and present for others doesn't happen automatically. It requires intention and desire. If we cannot develop human relationships on the fly, we cannot expect to develop the divine friendship without intent and desire.

Intentionally learning to notice when God shows up is a huge part of the spiritual journey. The following spiritual disciplines specifically address how to make space in a crowded life to notice the movements of the Spirit of God. They can take us into deep places of knowing how we are accepted, received and lovingly known by God.

# Contemplation

## Reflection Questions

1. How has the idea that we are to soak up as much life as possible affected your calendar?
2. How do you respond to the word *contemplation*?
3. What sort of things do you contemplate? What happens to you when you contemplate?
4. How do you contemplate your spiritual journey and relationship with God?
5. When is the last time you spent more than 5 minutes alone and quiet with God?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Contemplate Jesus. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet. Express to God your intention to rest in his love. Use your imagination: you may want to picture yourself leaning on Jesus or sitting beside Him, telling him your troubles, joys, and concerns. Be with Jesus. (When thoughts and distractions interrupt, gently return to Jesus. Begin again and again.) What is it like to receive God's gift of new beginnings?
2. Palms down, palms up.
  - Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor and your hands on your lap. Breathe deeply and relax. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of Jesus.
  - Turn your palms down and begin to drop your cares, worries, agendas and expectations into Jesus' hands. Let go of all that is heavy or burdensome. Relax. Breathe deeply.
  - When you have given your cares to Jesus, turn your palms up on your knees. Open your hands to receive God's presence, word and love. Listen.
  - When you feel prompted to end, tell the Lord what it is like for you to simply be with Him.
3. Take a contemplative walk with Jesus. Express your intention to be alone with God. Smell the air. Take in the sights. Appreciate God's good handiwork within and without. Love God for His gifts and goodness to you.



# *Unplugging*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. How has technology influenced your relationships? Do friends and family complain about the amount of time you spend online? What is their real concern?
2. Are you online for both work and pleasure? What do you like about being online? What don't you like about it?
3. What sort of temptations does cyberspace hold for you? How do you address these temptations?
4. Where are you using technology to avoid face-to-face encounters?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Technology assessment: Keep track of the amount of time you spend on the computer or talking on the phone each day. How much time does this amount to each week? Keep track of the uninterrupted time you spend in the presence of family and friends each day and week. Compare the times. Is God inviting you to reprioritize anything based on this awareness? If you cut back using the computer one hour a week, how could you use this time to be in the presence of God or others?
2. Plan a no-email day or week. Let people know you will not be answering your e-mail – but you will take phone calls and meet with people.
3. What is it like for you to receive a handwritten letter from a friend? Write a non-electronic letter to a friend. What surfaces in you while you take the time to do this? What is gained and what is lost in electronic communication? What do you think of the trade-offs?
4. Which relationships in your life need face time? Plan face-to-face time with several people this week. Do not let this time be interrupted by anything electronic.

## Week 4

# Relinquishment: Letting Go in a World Dedicated to Accumulation

Somewhere life has taught us that the self that God wants us to be is not possible. We either don't know what God wants or we allow the world to define who we are by the things we do: nurse, secretary, carpenter, businessperson, etc. We buy into the idea that we can be anything we want to be, and we try to create an identity based on secondary things: reputation, success, status, family, jobs, health.

But an identity based on these things is rooted in idols. And idols can be lost. Things that can be here today and gone tomorrow provide a precarious mooring for the soul. Our truest identity can never be something we accomplish, earn, or prove on our own. It's a gift we receive from Jesus. It is not something we earn through performance; it is what we are given. Scripture tells us that we are

- chosen (John 15:16)
- beloved children of God (1 John 3:1)
- friends of Jesus (John 15:15)
- the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- God's work of art (Ephesians 2:10)
- fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)

The following spiritual disciplines detach us from the idols that vie for our attention, and attach us to our true identity in Christ.

# Confession and Self-examination

## Reflection Questions

1. Does your confession tend to be along the lines of “Forgive my sins, dear Lord” rather than specifically naming your sins one by one before the face of God? What does the lack of specific confession do to self-awareness?
2. What experiences have affected your ability to give and receive forgiveness? Talk to God about what this means.
3. When have you tasted the joy of forgiveness? What was that like for you?
4. What is it like for you to confess your sins before a friend?
5. Which of your sins hurts those closest to you?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Imagine you are in a safe place, surrounded by the love of God. Ask God to help you see yourself as He sees you. Remember He sees you absolutely and with love. Using the Ten Commandments as a guide, journal your sins. When you have finished, go through each commandment one at a time, asking God to forgive you and help you to change. Then burn your list in a symbolic act of what it means to have God remove your sins from you.
2. Set aside some time for confession and self-examination. In the presence of God ask for light to pierce your defenses. Then ask yourself, *Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger and so on?* As the Holy Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings about these people to God. Ask God to forgive you and if need be to give you grace to forgive them. Write an apology, make a phone call or confess out loud in an attempt to put the relationship back on track.
3. Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, *What do I do that hurts you? How could I better love you? What is it like to be with me? Do I show interest in others or talk mostly about myself?* Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.
4. Turn to Psalm 32 or Psalm 51. Use the psalm as a way of bringing your own sins before God. How does God meet you in these confessions of David?

# *Submission*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. What is your reaction to the word submission?
2. What submitting experiences have you had?
3. Who is an example of someone who knew how to practice healthy, biblical submission? How has his or her life influenced you?
4. Do you have to have a submissive temperament? Why or why not?
5. What does it look like for a leader, and activist or an achiever to be submissive?
6. If you have questions about the biblical concept of submission, how might you educate yourself on the topic?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Arrange a small group discussion on the topic of submission. Ask people to share their positive or negative experiences of submission to each other. How does understanding these experiences inform your understanding of Ephesians 5:21 - "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"?
2. Who today do you submit to in the normal events of your life: boss, teachers, parents, colleagues, friends, spouse? What does healthy submission look like in each of these relationships? Pray for grace in these relationships.
3. Consider a character flaw you would like to have transformed in your life. Spend time in quiet prayer asking God to help you change this behavior. Look for Scriptures that will help you understand what a transformed life in this area will look like. (Suggestions: Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:6-8; John 3:30; Hebrews 13:17; Romans 12:1)
4. Start each day in prayer asking Jesus to be the Master of your life in every way, and in every situation you will face today.

## Week 5

# Sharing Your Life in a Culture Designed for Privacy

Keeping company with Jesus is not just a private spiritual act, it is the way we share the Trinitarian life of God with others. We are meant to live in community in the same way God does. In the company of others we make our journey and learn to tell the truth about ourselves.

The body of Christ is not something we create. It already is. But sharing our lives with others is always a risk. Authenticity, interdependence and being known come with a cost. But the alternative to paying the cost of living a one-another life is to live cut off from God. By appropriately opening ourselves to each other in the presence of Christ we discover the truth of John 15:13 “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” We learn how to become safe people who bring God’s welcoming embrace to others.

# Community

## Reflection Questions

1. How does the life you are leading reflect the value Christ places on belonging to the family of God?
2. What gifts do you bring to the body of Christ?
3. What kind of connection does Christ want you to have with Christian brothers and sisters?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Choose one of the “one anothers” – love one another, encourage one another, bear one another’s burdens, care for one another, accept one another, be kind to one another, live in harmony with one another, forgive one another, be hospitable to one another, honor one another, belong to one another, be devoted to one another, speak truthfully to one another, teach with one another, look out for one another, worship with one another, do not provoke one another, do not grumble against one another, pray for one another, forgive one another. Practice living one particular “one another” every day for a week. What is this practice like for you?
2. Ask someone to tell you their story. Listen to the story as deeply as you can. Tell the person how much it means to you to hear the story. How does the story give you a deeper understanding of your friend, of God and of yourself?
3. Begin a thank-you list. Thank God for the people in your life who have helped you grow.
4. If you have something against a brother or sister in Christ, go to that person and make peace with them. Meditate on Romans 12:18. Journal your response.
5. Join a small group, Sunday School class, outreach ministry, or a mission group. Commit to a community of faith and see how this imparts Christ to you in new and deep ways.

# Discipling

## Reflection Questions

1. What do you think the difference is between being a Christian and being a disciple?
2. *Discipline* and *disciple* come from the same root. What sort of reaction do you have to the word *discipline*?
3. Does being a disciplined apprentice of Jesus appeal to you? Why or why not?
4. Who do you want to become? What do you want to be remembered for when you die?
5. How are you intentionally partnering with God to become who he intended you to be?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. To discover where you are in your discipleship journey, draw a lifeline marking out seven-year segments. In each segment, write down the factors that shaped your growth in Christ. Are there particular disciplines that formed you? Have the disciplines changed with the season of your life? Where are there gaps in knowledge or experience in your journey?
2. Who have you intentionally given yourself to for the sake of their growth in Christ? List their names. Beside each name write what it was like for you to walk with them. Where were you challenged? How did you experience God in each relationship? Spend some time praying for each of these people.
3. If you have children at home, consider how you are reflecting the life of Jesus in your interaction at home. What would you like for them to learn about Jesus from you? Imagine Jesus in each of the rooms of your house. What is he enjoying? Who is he caring for? How can you thoughtfully model the virtues of Jesus' life in your relationships with your children?

## **Week 6**

# **Hearing From God**

God is a God of communication and words. Throughout the ages he has spoken to us through the written Word, the spoken word and the incarnate Word.

Our world of printed as well as verbal noise can drown out the reality and wonder of God's Word. There are always other books to read, and study guides and Bible commentaries that shed light on Scripture. But it is still God's own Word read under the direction of the Holy Spirit that opens us up to the God who is beyond us.

In the Bible we read about our sin and fallen state, but we also read about our belovedness and the love of God that he demonstrates for us through His Son, Jesus.

Reading God's Word, listening to Scripture on tape or singing biblical texts all put us in a place to attend to the God who speaks. God is still speaking and guiding us personally and intimately through the Word. Regularly being with God in his Word is a way we open ourselves to truths and guidance outside us.



# Bible Study

## Reflection Questions

1. How has God spoken to you through the study of his Word? How has Bible study affected your life?
2. When the Word of God seems dry to you, why do you think that is?
3. What are you looking for when you read Scripture – information, comfort, understanding, guidance, a word from God, communion with God? How does what you are looking for influence how you study?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Experiment with different ways of listening to Scripture.
  - Read the Bible out loud. Savor the words. Which words stand out for you? Keep these words with you all day.
  - Listen to the Bible on tape or CD while driving or exercising.
  - Print a verse on a card and place it where you will see it throughout the day. Put a verse on your screen saver.
2. Try each of the following ways of reading Scripture, and listen to the different ways God speaks to you.
  - **Artist Method:** Read a passage and consider the following questions:
    1. What speaks to my heart? Draw a heart next to the word that speaks to your heart.
    2. What new thought or idea comes to me? Draw a light bulb beside the new thought or idea.
    3. What does Scripture move me to do?
  - **Detective Method:** Read a short narrative passage from one of the Gospels. Let the story take shape in your mind's eye. Imagine the scene. Observe the facts. Ask the *who, what, where, when, why* questions. What meaning did the actions have for the characters? What meaning do the actions have for you? Then apply your study to your own life.
  - **Treasure-seeker method:** Read a passage and ask yourself Is there an example here for me to follow? Is there a promise to claim or a command to obey? Is there a truth to be applied, a prayer for me to pray, a sin to be confessed, or a question God is asking me?

# Devotional Reading

## Reflection Questions

1. How has your faith journey been characterized by a head-heart split?
2. How has God's love moved from being a matter of belief to a real and lived experience?
3. How has Scripture brought you into the presence of Christ?

## Spiritual Exercises

### 1. *Lectio Divina*:

- *Silencio*: Put yourself in the presence of God. Become quiet and offer yourself to God
- *Lectio*: Read Mark 10:46-52 or Luke 5:1-11 out loud, slowly allowing the words to resonate and settle in your heart. Linger on the word or phrase that catches your attention.
- *Meditatio*: Read the passage again and listen to where the word connects with your life right now. Enter into the scene in your imagination. Envision the scene. Carefully watch the people, notice the sounds and smells, listen to the sounds around you. What do you hear and experience as you watch and listen?
- *Oratio*: Read the passage one more time, listening attentively. Has God addressed you in this Word and invited you to respond? Allow the Scripture to lead you into a prayer response.
- *Contemplatio*: Deeply receive God's Word and rest in his presence and love. Give yourself some time to wait and be still before you re-enter life as usual.

2. When you read Scripture, insert your own name into the pronouns that stand for *you*. For example, Isaiah 43:1-3.

3. Choose a biblical character with whom you identify. Turn to Scripture passages in which this character shows up. Read the passage aloud, placing yourself in the story as an onlooker. Let the story settle deeply into you. Listen to similarities between you and this biblical character. Where do you struggle like he or she does? How do this character's circumstances give deeper meaning to your journey? How does this story help you understand your own story and where God is in that story?

## Week 7

# Incarnating Jesus

This addresses the desire and call to offer others the taste of God's life-changing love. The Son of God came to earth and took on flesh (was incarnate) to show us the face of God's love. While on earth Jesus called his followers to incarnate this show-and-tell love in their own bodies.

The incarnating disciplines open us to God's heart. They invite us to participate in God's kingdom agenda: his love of justice, his concern of the poor and the oppressed, the widow and the orphan.

These disciplines are ways we express our faith, hope and love in the midst of a selfish, entitlement world.

We can expect that truly "loving our neighbor as ourselves" will take us to depths of self-donating love. In those depths we are in the heart of worship.

# Compassion

## Reflection Questions

1. When is compassion deserved or underserved?
2. What experiences in your past make it easy or difficult to be compassionate with yourself or with others?
3. Do you think the attitude that “people just need to work harder and show more initiative in order to get on in life” affects relationships? How?
4. What is it like for you when people are compassionate toward you?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Become quiet and still. Get in touch with your desire to see Jesus. Read the crucifixion account in one of the Gospels. As you read, become one of the watchers (Mary, a disciple, a soldier or a thief). What do you see from this person’s perspective? What is it like for Jesus to be abandoned by the ones he loves? What desire drives Jesus to the cross? Let Jesus summon you into prayer.
2. Construct a timeline of your losses. At each point record how you responded (anger, blame, denial, withdrawal, depression, etc.). How did moments of compassion come or not come into these moments? Talk with Jesus about these moments.
3. Choose one way you can show compassion to someone this week. After you have done so, talk to someone about what it was like for you to do this.
4. Consider who the outsiders and disenfranchised are in your community. Choose one of these groups and find out something about them. What do they need? What do they have to give? Where is God calling you to walk in his compassion?
5. Ask three people who are close to you if they will honestly answer some questions: “How do I come across?” “What is it like to be with me?” “Do I show interest in others?” “Do I mostly talk about myself?” What do you learn about the way you come across? Share the results with Jesus.

# *Humility*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Who in your life tells you the truth without praise or blame? What is it like?
2. Does humility appeal to you or not? Explain?
3. How do you recognize true humility?
4. Do you tend to believe you have earned everything you have and deserve everything because of your ability and raw talent?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Pray for the character you wish you could have.
2. If you are quick to draw attention to your good works, begin to do some things anonymously. What is it like for you? What does it mean to you to have only God know?
3. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." What are the characteristics of a gentle and humble heart? How are you cultivating a gentle and humble heart?
4. Assess your own image-management quotient: Spend a week intentionally listening to how you speak about yourself to others. Journal when you spin the truth to put yourself in a better light. Can you hear yourself saying, "I never watch TV, but yesterday I saw . . ."? Why is it important for you to be known as someone who doesn't watch TV? When introduced to others, note what you say about yourself and what you want to come out about you. What would it mean to speak more simply and truthfully about yourself? Ask God to root you in his love and set you free to simply be who you are.

## Week 8

# Praying My Life

Prayer is a word that describes a relationship. Disciplines of prayer provide patterns for attending to God throughout the day. Prayer is sustained less by duty than by a desire to connect and grow in intimacy and communion with the Holy Trinity.

But prayer also moves us up and out into our world.

Henri Nouwen writes, "Prayer is the way to both the heart of God and the heart of the world – precisely because they have been joined through the suffering of Jesus Christ . . . Praying is letting one's own heart become the place where the tears of God's children merge and become tears of hope."

# Centering Prayer

## Reflection Questions

1. How do you express your desire for God?
2. What is it like for you to spend time with God when you are not speaking to him? What happens inside you when you are quiet with God?

## Spiritual Exercises

1. Sacred word. Choose a prayer word as the symbol of your desire to let Jesus' action and presence form you. The word could reflect a deep desire of your heart (love, peace, grace, etc.) or the word might be a name or title of God (Jesus, Shepherd, Counselor, Healer of my soul, Defender, etc.). Become still and offer yourself and your love to God. Let this word or phrase draw you into the presence of Christ. When you are distracted, return gently to your word and to the Lord.
2. Set aside twenty minutes every day for six days. Follow the steps in "A Short Method for Centering Prayer." Practice centering prayer each day. After a week reflect on your experience. Do you sense any internal shifts? In the weeks ahead slowly stretch your times with God.

## A Short Method for Centering Prayer

1. Set aside a minimum of fifteen minutes (increase the time as you can).
2. Settle into a comfortable position.
3. Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, in the center of his love.
4. Focus on a sacred word (see above).
5. Take time to be quiet. Let your noisy thoughts go. When your thoughts wander let them drop to the bottom of your mind and return to Christ through repeating your word. Be with Jesus. Listen. Be still.

*Try this:* Imagine that God's river of life runs through you. Deep down, the river is calm and slow. But on the surface there is rushing and debris. Imagine your distracting thoughts are part of the debris floating in the current. Don't try to capture these thoughts; release them and let the river of God's life carry them away. Anytime you are distracted, let the distractions go with the river and gently return to the presence of Christ with your prayer word.

6. Rest in the center of God's love. Trust the Holy Spirit who abides in the depths of your spirit to connect you with God.
7. Take several minutes to come out of prayer. Don't hurry. Breathe in the presence of Christ. Offer yourself to God for the tasks awaiting you.

# *Prayer of Recollection*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. What makes it difficult for you to concentrate while praying?
2. What do distractions in prayer reveal about your core identity and concerns?
3. What is it like to not have a clear role that defines how you are to interact with others?

## **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Find a quiet place where you can sit comfortably before the Lord. Take some deep breaths, relaxing your body and quieting your mind. Offer yourself to God. Ask him to gather up the fragments of your scattered life and recollect your soul. Rest before him. Each time you are distracted, write down the distraction. After ten minutes look at the words you have jotted down.

- What stands out to you?
- What anxieties do you see?
- Where is your identity centered?

Confess that you are not called to control all that disrupts your life. Return these concerns to the Lord. Let him hold the concerns of your heart as you rest in him.

2. Intentionally come into the presence of God. Spend several moments thanking Jesus that he is present with you. Then quietly settle into resting with and in him. When you become distracted, invite Jesus to look at the distraction with you.

- What does Jesus want to say to you about the distraction?

Give the distraction to him again and settle into rest. Continue the process of handing distractions to Jesus as you settle more and more deeply into your restful identity in him.