

# Reflection and Prayer

## *A Spiritual Inventory and Spiritual Markers*

Evelyn C. Davis, Ed.D.  
May, 2010  
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**My times are in your hands.**

*Psalm 31:15a*  
*New International Version*

**... His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that will not pass away, and his kingdom  
is one that will never be destroyed.**

*Daniel 7:14*

*New International Version*



# A Spiritual Inventory and Spiritual Markers

Evelyn C. Davis, 2010

Henry T. Blackaby (*Experiencing God*, 1994) points out how God instructed the Israelites to take stones from the Jordan to carry with them as a reminder of his mighty act in parting the waters for them to cross over (Joshua 4:1–9). These stones would be *a memorial to what God had done*.

It is helpful for us to do a spiritual inventory and identify spiritual markers in our own lives: times *when we have encountered God's call or direction*—times of transition or decision when we have clearly known that God has guided us. Then when we face new options and/or decisions, we can review our spiritual markers to be reminded of the context of *the activity of God* in our lives—*his perspective* for our past and present.

Especially when we find ourselves in difficult or confusing circumstances, we can see what seems to be *most consistent* with what God has already been doing. If nothing seems consistent, then we can continue to pray and wait on the Lord's guidance.

Follow these guidelines to work through your spiritual inventory and spiritual markers. These will include your spiritual heritage, your salvation experience, times that you made significant decisions regarding your future, and various periods of your adult life when there were distinct markers.

Before beginning, *spend time with the Lord in prayer*. Ask him to assist you in identifying those times when he has clearly guided you. In summary, consider the questions on the Application Worksheet, pages 10–11. When you finish, don't feel that you necessarily have a comprehensive list, but add to it later as you *continue to pray and reflect on his activity* in your life.



## ***Goal of the Topic:***

To identify times and ways God has clearly guided you in the past, and to seek his direction for your future.

## ***Spiritual Inventory***

My Spiritual Heritage (or lack of one)

How God Led/Lessons Learned

Significant Childhood Experiences/Spiritual Impact

How God Led/Lessons Learned

Salvation Experience

How God Led/Lessons Learned

Significant Adolescence Experiences/Decisions Regarding Future

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Significant College Experiences/Decisions Regarding Future

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Any Other Significant Experiences Before the Age of Twenty

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

## ***Spiritual Markers***

Work through the periods up to your current age. Then proceed to the Application Worksheet, pages 10–11.

Twenty-Something  
(age and where you were)

Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Thirty-Something  
(age and where you were)

Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Forty-Something  
(age and where you were)

Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Fifty-Something  
(age and where you were)

Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Sixty-Something  
(age and where you were)

Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

Seventy-Something (plus)  
(age and where you were)

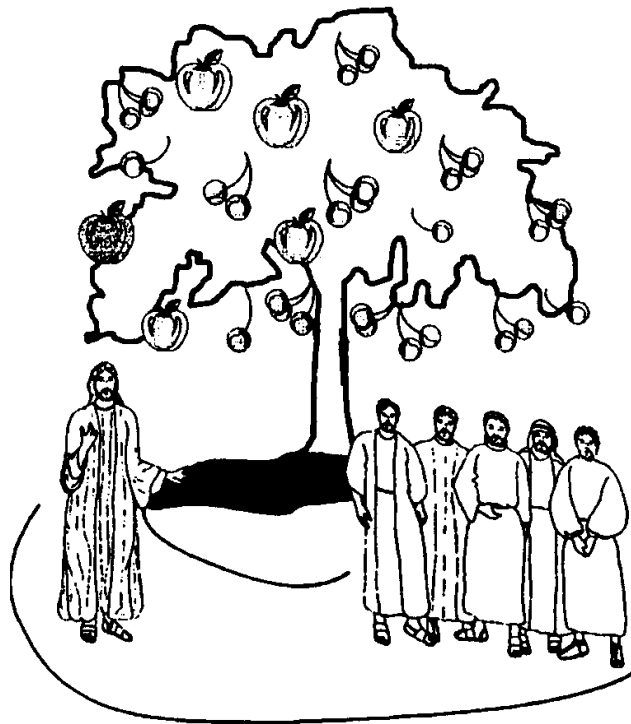
Transition/Decisions/Direction

How God Led/  
Lessons Learned

**You did not choose me,  
but I chose you and appointed you  
to go and bear fruit—  
fruit that will last ...**

*John 15:16a*

*New International Version*





4. What has the Lord been *saying to you* as you have filled out this inventory and identified your spiritual markers?

5. What implications does this have for the *passage/transition* that you are currently experiencing?

6. What implications does this have *for the future*?

7. Other:

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

*Philippians 4:6-7*

*New International Version*



# A Time of Recommitment

**Leader:**

‘For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope’ (Jeremiah 29:11 NASB).

**All:**

I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God’. My times are in your hands (Psalm 31:14–15a NIV).  
The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever (Psalm 138:8a NIV).

**Leader:**

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you (Psalm 32:8–9 NIV).

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain (John 15:16a NKJV).

**All:**

Turn my eyes away from worthless things (Psalm 119:37a NIV).

Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe your commandments (Psalm 119:66 NKJV).

For it is God who is at work in me, both to will and to work for *his* good pleasure (Philippians 2:13 NASB).

**Leader:**

Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs (Isaiah 54:2 NASB).

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7 NKJV).

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; surely I will help you; surely I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10 NASB).

... whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe (Proverbs 29:25b NIV).

**All:**

... that He would grant me, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner being’ (Ephesians 3:16 TNIV).

**Leader:**

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute; if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8 TNIV).

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 NIV).

**All:**

Now to Him who is able to keep me from stumbling, and to make me stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy; to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever (Jude 24–25 NASB).

... that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored ... (2 Thessalonians 3:1 NIV).

... if only I may finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24 NIV).



## Articles, A Psalm, Prayers, and An Intercessor

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# 'If I Could Live My Life Over ...'

## Discipleship Journal Classic from Issue 17 (1984)

Robert Boardman (2006)

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*It's never too late to adjust your priorities.*

Is it right to dwell on past weaknesses and failures? Letting sleeping dogs lie is often the better part of wisdom. The Apostle Paul spoke of 'forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead' (Philippians 3:13).

But the Bible is history, and it tells not only of success but also of failures by individuals and nations—failures that teach us lessons. We are to learn from the past. So if I can tell you in a positive, constructive way about my own failures and mistakes, and thereby challenge you not to repeat them, it is a valid venture. If I can help just one other person avoid one of my pitfalls, then I rejoice.

It is important to remember, however, that God made each one of us different in temperament, personality, emotional make-up, spiritual gifts, capacities, callings, and experiences. My areas of failure may be your areas of success. Nevertheless, I believe we may have many of the weak points I list here in common.

If I could live my life again, I would seek to make the following changes.

### ***1. I would stand more boldly upon my God-given calling and not be so fearful.***

In September 1943, I became a Christian while serving as a young marine in the South Pacific. Six months later God called me to serve Him with my whole life. He revealed the details of that call step by step in subsequent years; it included sending me to Japan as a missionary.

I was not a heroic missionary volunteer to the land of my wartime enemy. Rather, I was a reluctant, fearful candidate whom God had to 'draft' into His service. I was much like Jonah, who resisted the Lord's plans to send

him to Nineveh, the great city of his enemy. My temptation is to be fearful—of the unknown future, others' reactions to ventures of faith I want to take, real adversaries. Nevertheless, God's gracious call to me in early 1944 has been the anchor of my soul when circumstances and my own limitations resurrect the specter of fear.

I know that if my heart were more fully set on this calling, I would have been even more kingdom-minded. I would have been bold as a lion, remembering God's promise in Isaiah 54:17:

'No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me.'

### ***2. While my children were young, I would spend more time with them in worship, in spiritual disciplines, and in just enjoying life.***

I've read that by the time children enter first grade, the basic direction of their lives has already been determined. What we as parents do or don't do before our children enter school determines what they will be.

As a young, full-time Christian worker, my temptation was to think that what I did with my little children was not that important. I thought that when they grew older and could understand better, I would give them more attention. So I became busy in a ministry with young adults, waiting for my own children to grow up. I foolishly took too much for granted, and I gave my excellent wife, Jean, more than her share of the load in our children's upbringing.

There is some consolation for me in seeing that the 12 disciples had the same limited outlook on the importance of children. But to this, Jesus responded, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these’ (Mark 10:14).

### ***3. I would ask God for greater blessings and victories, claiming His mighty promises.***

Salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is a matter of believing the promises in God’s Word and claiming them to be true for our own lives in order to be saved from our sins. Subsequent steps toward spiritual maturity are also a matter of believing God’s Word. Common people become uncommon as they stand on the promises of God.

Today I have mixed feelings as I think of portions of Scripture I claimed in the past that are now being fulfilled. On the one hand, I rejoice and am overwhelmed at how God works and blesses. On the other hand, I ask myself why I then didn’t claim more of his amazing promises so that He could do more through this unworthy servant.

I went to Japan as a result of praying over God’s promises. One verse I continually claimed was Psalm 2:8: ‘Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession’ (*KJV*). As an heir of God and joint heir with Christ, I believed I could legitimately claim that portion of Scripture.

With Psalm 2:8 in mind, I prayed for the nations using a world atlas. Dawson Trotman—founder of The Navigators, the ministry organization with which I served—and I would kneel in his study and put our fingers on country after country, key city after key city throughout the world, praying, pleading, and interceding for the salvation of the people who lived there.

As time passes, we are tempted to rely on our past experiences, on the knowledge we’ve gained, on new methods and ideas—on every-

thing except God’s exceedingly great and precious promises. Yet these promises are as sure as if they were already fulfilled, if we will but claim and believe them.

### ***4. By God’s grace, I would turn more quickly from temptation and sin.***

We tend to play with fire as long as possible, even though it does put us in danger of destroying all that is beautiful to us, including our lives and families.

We have an extremely clever enemy—much more clever than we are. He knows our weakest points, studies them, and works on them continually in his desire to ruin us. He is a master strategist who knows where, when, and how to attack.

Each of us has at least one point of vulnerability, something referred to in Hebrews 12:1 as the sin that ‘so easily beset[s] us’ (*KJV*). It could be the love of money, the lust for power, an uncontrolled tongue, pride, lust for the opposite sex, sowing discord among brothers, procrastination, or just plain disobedience—refusing to do the clearly known will of God. Often, victory over these sins is ours only if, by God’s grace, we resist Satan and flee from our strong temptation.

The couple who lived across the street from us in Japan were acupuncturists and shiatsu specialists. Mr. S was gone in the daytime. One day when I was experiencing extreme pain in my neck, I considered going to see Mrs. S for treatment. However, my conscience clearly revealed that I would risk too much by visiting such an attractive woman alone. It was far better to have a bad neck than a ruined moral life.

I want Jabez’s prayer to be mine: ‘Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!’ (1 Chronicles 4:10, *KJV*).

### ***5. I would welcome trials and failures as menders of my character.***

James commands us:

‘When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don’t resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance.’ (James 1:2–3, *Phillips*).

God has His own special training program for each of us: a physical injury or disease, a broken heart over a relationship, a friend who becomes an adversary, relatives who harass us, fruit in evangelism that turns out to be false, disunity on our ministry team, inconsistency in spiritual disciplines, financial struggles, career conflicts, and so on. These often bring a sense of failure and a loss of confidence.

In such trials, I am tempted to complain and not trust God’s sovereignty. I want to give up or to fight against God’s purposes. I murmur against my spiritual leader and others whom I feel are conspiring against me. Or I am tempted to think that God has forgotten and forsaken me.

But when I reflect on my trials with a faith rooted in God’s Word, I know He has my best interests at heart. He is a loving Father who chastens me because I am His son. He is purging out the dross, and only the fire of trials can bring the impurities to the top. So to these trials I must say with fear and trembling, ‘Welcome, friends!’

**6. *I would ask more of people under my leadership.***

In my ministry, I have often underestimated the capacity of those whom I was training; I’ve misjudged their desire to grow, serve, and accept challenge. Sometimes I’ve feared offending them by asking too much, even though I seldom met that reaction.

Jesus never hesitated to stretch His disciples beyond their abilities in order to bring them to their full potential. His dealings with Peter

are an example.

Helping others reach spiritual maturity takes time, tears, failure, faith, prayer, trust, humility, love, responsiveness, perseverance, intercession, and clear objectives. There are various stages in a disciple’s growth, and what can be taught to him tomorrow cannot be taught today. Jesus knew this. ‘I have yet many things to say unto you,’ He told His disciples, ‘but ye cannot bear them now’ (John 16:12, *KJV*). God can reveal the right timing to us in answer to prayer.

So timing *is* important, yet I may have been too cautious. God gives us wonderful promises for the men and women He entrusts to us, and by acting on these promises we can see God work bless, and multiply our efforts beyond our expectations.

**7. *I would be more considerate and communicative toward my wife, my children, and my fellow workers.***

God has given me a unique and wonderful wife. Jean and I have been married 30 years. Yet it took me the first 10 of those years to learn to praise her. In Proverbs 31:28, we read that the woman of virtue is praised by her husband and children. If I, as her husband, praise Jean, my children will also. If I don’t, they won’t. They learn from my example.

I would also have been more thoughtful with those I worked with. In the early years of pioneering ministry in Japan, I occasionally made major decisions that affected staff members and their families—sometimes with little consideration for their feelings, and with little discussion. My decisions were not necessarily bad, but often the manner in which I made them was not thoughtful. Scripture admonishes me to walk in my calling ‘with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Ephesians 4:2–3, *KJV*).

**8. *I would be more single-minded in following a lifetime program of personal Bible study and Scripture memory.***

God has graciously helped me discover in the Scriptures some things about Himself, my life, and the needs of the ministry. Yet I feel I'm operating only on the fringes of His Word, which is more powerful than any nuclear weapon. The supernatural Word of the living God melts and breaks our hard hearts. 'Is not my word like fire,' declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?' (Jeremiah 23:29).

There are gaps in my life regarding many rich books of the Bible that I ought to have studied and mastered by now. But I am tempted to procrastinate—to act as if I have all the time in the world.

Yet time is slipping by so rapidly. I am now 59 years old. If the 70 years of a 'normal' lifespan were squeezed into a single day, it would now be 8:30 in the evening of my life.

If I were young, I would work out a lifetime Bible-study plan that I would review and revise as necessary each year. Such a plan

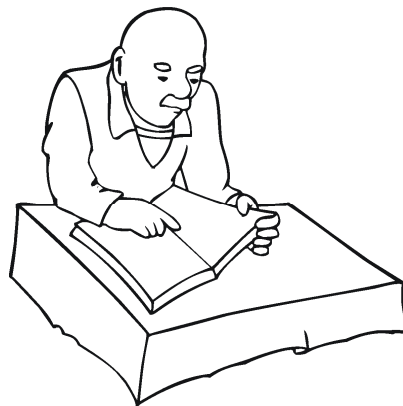
would need to be flexible, so that it would fit my lifestyle and my ministry calling. It would include memorizing Scripture and reading through the Bible once a year. Following the plan would require personal initiative, but I would also find someone to help me.

**9. *I would develop a hobby earlier in life.***

Christian workers are often hard-driving, hardworking people who seldom recognize their need to slow down. When I was a young adult, I'm not sure anyone could have convinced me that I needed a hobby. I was 46 before I began to discover that I had some hidden talent in woodcarving.

Since then I have learned the benefits of developing a hobby. It relieves stress by diverting my attention from the ministry. It releases my creativity and gives me opportunities to use my mind and hands in a new sphere. It leads to a new circle of friends and involves my whole family in wider horizons of experience. And it teaches me about the wonders of creativity and about the Creator who made us and who is still at work within us.

**Robert Boardman** is the chaplain for four U.S. Marine Corps veterans groups and is the author of *Unforgettable Men in Unforgettable Times (Selah)*. Bob and his wife, Jean, live in Seattle and have five children (from Issue 17, 1984).



## And Furthermore ...

### What I Would Add Today To My Original List

Twenty-two years ago at the age of 59, I was inspired to put together a message called 'If I Could Live My Life Over.'

When my wife, Jean, first heard that title she sweetly said, 'Do you know what my first question is?' I made a guess: 'It would be, "Would I marry the same woman again?," right?' God was never more gracious than to give me Jean. For many years when we lived in Japan I kept a little plaque by our bedside that read, 'If I could choose again, I'd still choose you.' Marrying Jean is one thing about my life that I wouldn't change.

In the intervening years since I first delivered this message, and *Discipleship Journal* turned it into an article, I have had many open doors from the living God to share these lessons and failures with others. With this 25th anniversary edition of *DJ*, I've been offered the opportunity to update my reflections of decades ago. I've concluded that there are at least two major areas that I still long for God to develop in my life.

The first is that I might have a more keen awareness of my mortality and the mortality of others. I sometimes live and act as if I, and all about me, will never change. Especially when things seem to be going well.

Psalms 90 reminds me of how short my life is compared to eternity. My life is like a watch in the night. It is like a flood that quickly sweeps by; like a night's sleep from which I soon awaken; or like grass that grows, flourishes and in a short time is mown and withers. The psalmist's prayer in view of our few earthly seconds is 'Lord, teach me how to interpret my existence that I may gain a heart of wisdom' (v. 12, my paraphrase).

Philip, father of Alexander the Great, had a slave whose primary duty every day was to enter the king's presence no matter the circumstances and announce with a clear, loud voice, 'Remember, Philip, that you must die!'

I cannot afford a servant to remind me daily

of my mortality, but there are several methods I employ. One of the most effective, which I have been practicing since 1993, is that each time someone I know personally dies—a veteran, close friend, collaborator, or relative—I add his or her name to a list I carry with me. As of this writing the list includes 98 names. It reminds me that my remaining sojourn upon earth is short; I don't want to waste any of it. I want to walk obediently by God's side and not insist upon my will and my way.

It is a miracle life walking with Jesus. When I stumble or rebel, Jesus graciously loves me still and patiently disciplines me and draws me back from my tangent. He never gives up. What a Savior!

The second matter that continually cries out as a major need in my life as I thunder down the homestretch is to know the Person of Jesus Christ.

I became a true believer and follower of my blessed Savior 62 years ago as a teenage marine. Then within the next five years, Philippians 3:10 became one of my life verses: 'That I may know [Christ], and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death' (*KJV*).

I have failed miserably to come as close to knowing my wonderful Savior as I ought to. I long for Him; I want to be like Mary, who said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word' (Luke 1:38, *KJV*). I search for Him in His holy book. In my daily pursuit I have recorded reading the Old Testament 50 times and the New Testament 107 times. Yet I fall so far short of all the great Apostle Paul said in his incomparable declaration in Philippians 3:10!

My life is like a single coin. I can spend it any way I want ... but I can only spend it once. Lord, help me to spend my coin for Your glory, getting to know more and more of You, with the fewest possible regrets!

—Robert Boardman  
2006

## 23rd Psalm

### ***'It's All About Living'***

The Lord is my Shepherd ... *That's Relationship!*

I shall not want ... *That's Supply!*

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ... *That's Rest!*

He leadeth me beside still waters ... *That's Refreshment!*

He restoreth my soul ... *That's Healing!*

He leadeth me in the path of righteousness ... *That's Guidance!*

For His name sake ... *That's Purpose!*

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... *That's Testing!*

I will fear no evil ... *That's Protection!*

For Thou are with me ... *That's Faithfulness!*

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me ... *That's Security!*

Thou prepareth a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ... *That's Affirmation!*

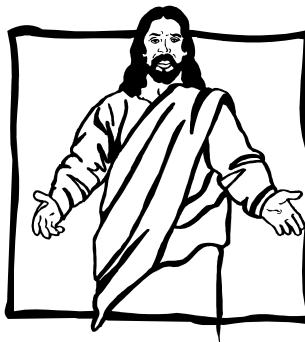
Thou annointest my head with oil ... *That's Consecration!*

My cup runneth over ... *That's Abundance!*

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all my life ... *That's Blessing!*

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord ... *That's Security!*

Forever ... *That's Eternity!*



—Orval C. Butcher

# Spiritual Formation Agenda

Richard Foster (2009)

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*My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you ...*

—Galatians 4:19

Our world today cries out for a theology of spiritual growth that has been proven to work in the midst of the harsh realities of daily life. Sadly, many have simply given up on the possibility of growth in character formation.

Vast numbers of well-intended folk have exhausted themselves in church work and discovered that this did not substantively change their lives. They found that they were just as impatient and egocentric and fearful as when they began lifting the heavy load of church work. Maybe more so.

Others have immersed themselves in multiple social-service projects. But while the glow of helping others lingered for a time, they soon realized that all their herculean efforts left little lasting imprint on the inner life. Indeed, it often made them much worse inwardly: frustrated and angry and bitter.

Still others have a practical theology that will not allow for spiritual growth. Indeed, they just might see it as a bad thing. Having been saved by grace, these people have become paralyzed by it. To attempt any progress in the spiritual life smacks of ‘works righteousness’ to them. Their liturgies tell them they sin in word, thought, and deed daily, so they conclude that this is their fate until they die. Heaven is their only release from this world of sin and rebellion. Hence, these well-meaning folk will sit in their pews year after year without realizing any movement forward in their life with God.

Finally, a general cultural malaise touches us all to one extent or another. I am referring to how completely we have become accustomed to the normality of dysfunction. The constant media stream of scandals and broken lives

and mayhem of every sort elicits from us hardly more than a yawn. We have come to expect little else, even from our religious leaders—perhaps especially from our religious leaders. This overall dysfunction is so pervasive in our culture that it is nearly impossible for us to have a clear vision of spiritual progress. Shining models of holiness are so rare today.

Yet echoing through the centuries is a great company of witnesses telling us of a life vastly richer and deeper and fuller. In all walks of life and in all human situations, they have found a life of ‘righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Romans 14:17). They have discovered that real, solid, substantive transformation into the likeness of Christ is possible.

They witness to a character formation that is nigh unto amazing. They have seen their egocentric passions give way to such selflessness and humility of heart, it astonishes even them. Rage and hate and malice are replaced with love and compassion and universal goodwill.

There is a more than 2,000-year record of great ones in this life—Augustine and Francis and Teresa and à Kempis and many more—who, by following hard after Jesus in this way, became persons of absolute sterling character. The record is there for anyone who wants to see.

Thirty years ago, when *Celebration of Discipline* was first penned, we were faced with two huge tasks: First, we needed to revive the great conversation about the formation of the soul; and second, we needed to incarnate this reality into the daily ex-

perience of individual, congregational, and cultural life. Frankly, we have had much greater success with the first task. Christians of all sorts now know about the need for spiritual formation, and look to saints Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant for guidance.

It's the second task that needs to consume the bulk of our energies for the next 30 years. If we do not make real progress on these fronts, all our efforts will dry up and blow away.

One critical reminder before we begin in earnest: Spiritual formation is not a toolkit for 'fixing' our culture or our churches or even our individual lives. Fixing things is simply not our business. So we stoutly refuse to engage in formation work to 'save America from its moral decline' or to restore churches to their days of past glory or even to rescue folk from their destructive behaviors. No! We *do* spiritual formation work because it is kingdom work. Spiritual formation work is smack in the center of the map of the kingdom of God. Therefore, all other matters we gladly leave in the good hands of God.

### Heart Work

God has given each one of us the responsibility to 'grow in grace' (2 Peter 3:18). This is not something we can pass off onto others. We are to take up our individualized crosses and follow in the steps of the crucified and risen Christ.

All real formation work is 'heart work.' The heart is the wellspring of all human action. All of the devotional masters call us constantly, almost monotonously, toward a purity of heart. The great Puritan divines, for example, gave sustained attention to this. In *Keeping the Heart*, John Flavel, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century English Puritan, notes that the 'greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to keep the heart *with* God ... Heart work is hard work indeed.'

When we are dealing with heart work, external actions are never the center of our attention. Outward actions are a natural result of something far deeper, far more profound.

The ancient maxim *Actio sequitur esse*, 'action follows essence,' reminds us that our action is always in accord with the inward reality of our heart. This, of course, does not reduce good works to insignificance, but it does make them matters of secondary significance, effects rather than causes. Of primary significance is our vital union with God, our new creation in Christ, our immersion in the Holy Spirit. It is this life that purifies the heart; when the branch is truly united with the vine and receiving its life from the vine, spiritual fruit is a natural result.



**The most important, most real,  
most lasting work is  
accomplished in the depths of  
our heart. This work is solitary  
and interior. It is a work known  
only to God.**



This is why the moral philosophers could say, 'Virtue is easy.' When the heart is purified by the action of the Spirit, the most natural thing in the world is the virtuous thing. To the pure in heart, vice is what is hard.

It is no vain thing for us to return to our first love over and over and over again. It is an act of faith to continually cry out to God to search us and know our heart and root out every wicked way in us (Psalm 139:23–24). This is a vital aspect of the salvation of the Lord.

We are, each and every one of us, a tangled mass of motives: hope and fear, faith and doubt, simplicity and duplicity, honesty and falsity, openness and guile. God is the only one who can separate the true from the false,

the only one who can purify the motives of the heart.

But God does not come uninvited. If certain chambers of our heart have never experienced God's healing touch, perhaps it is because we have not welcomed the divine scrutiny.

The most important, most real, most lasting work is accomplished in the depths of our heart. This work is solitary and interior. It cannot be seen by anyone, not even ourselves. It is a work known only to God. It is the work of heart purity, of soul conversion, of inward transformation, of life formation.

It begins first by our turning to the light of Jesus. For some, this is an excruciatingly slow turning, turning until we turn round right. For others, it is instantaneous and glorious. In either case, we are coming to trust in Jesus, to accept Jesus as our Life. As we read about in John 3, we are born from above. But our being *born* from above, of necessity, includes our being *formed* from above. Being spiritually born is a beginning—a wonderful, glorious beginning. It is not an ending.

Much intense formation work is necessary before we can stand the fires of heaven. Much training is necessary before we are the kind of persons who can safely and easily reign with God.

So now, we are ushered into this new relationship. As Peter puts it in his first letter, we 'have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God' (1 Peter 1:23). God is alive! Jesus is real and active in our little affairs.

And so we begin to pray, to enter into an interactive communion with God. At first our praying is uneasy and halting. It's an alternation of our attention back and forth from divine glories to the mundane tasks of home and work. Back and forth, back and forth. And often the alternation is worse—

much worse—than not praying at all. One moment we are reveling in divine glories, the next moment our minds are wallowing in the gutter of base desires.

Our lives are fractured and fragmented. As Thomas Kelly puts it, we are living in 'an intolerable scramble of panting feverishness.' We feel the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are 'unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow.' But through time and experience—sometimes much time and experience—God begins to give us an amazing staidness in the Divine Center. In the depths of our being, alternation gives way to a well-nigh unbroken life of humble adoration before the living presence of God.

This is not ecstasy but serenity, unshakableness, and firmness of life orientation. In the words of George Fox, we become 'established' men and women.

We begin to develop a habit of divine orientation. Now this is no perfectionism, but it is progress in our life with God. The interior work of prayer becomes much simpler now. Slowly we find that little glances heavenward and quiet breathings of submission are all that are needed to draw us into a habitual orientation of our heart towards God. Without even knowing it, we are practicing the presence of God. Formal times of prayer merely join into and enhance the steady undercurrent of quiet worship that underlies all our days.

Behind the foreground of daily life continues the background of heavenly orientation.

This is the formation of the heart before God. To use the words of Kelly, it is 'a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time.'

As apprentices of Jesus we are learning, always learning how to live well; love God well; love our spouse well; raise our children


well; love our friends and neighbors—and even our enemies—well; study well; face adversity well; run our businesses and financial institutions well; form community life well; reach out to those on the margins well; and die well—*ars moriendi*.

And, as we learn how to live well, we share with others what we are learning. This is the structure of love for the building up of the body of Christ.

We are not alone in this work of the reformation of the heart. It is imperative for us to help each other in every way we can. And in our day, the desperate need is for the emergence of a massive spiritual army of trained spiritual directors who can lovingly come alongside precious people and help them discern how to walk by faith in the circumstances of their own lives.


Please note that I said ‘trained’ spiritual directors and not ‘certified’ spiritual directors.

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**Everyone thinks of changing the world, but where, oh where, are those who think of changing themselves?**

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There is a genuinely bad idea circulating these days that if we take a certain number of courses and read a certain number of books and receive a certain kind of certification, we will be ready to be spiritual directors. I’m sorry; I really do wish it were that simple. But no, we are here talking about life training. And it is only by life training that we will see the development of a certain kind of life, a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It is this quality of life—the ability to forgive when it is painful, the yearning for prayer—that we are looking for in trained spiritual directors.

We have real difficulty here because everyone thinks of changing the world, but where, oh where, are those who think of changing themselves? People may genuinely want to be good, but seldom are they prepared to do what it takes to produce the inward life of goodness that can form the soul. Personal formation into the likeness of Christ is arduous and lifelong.

### **Fellowship Gathering Power**

This naturally leads to the second great arena of work for the years ahead: congregational renewal. If in our churches we do not do the hard work of spiritual formation, we will not get spiritually formed people. So this is a vital arena of labor, and I am speaking of both congregations as traditionally understood, as well as newly emerging forms of our life together.

At the outset it is important for us to see the context in which we labor.

First, we have in our churches a ‘hurry sickness.’ Many of our people are adrenaline addicts, and the overall spirit of our day is one of climb and push and shove, of noise and hurry and crowds. But spiritual formation work simply does not occur in a hurry. It is never a quick-fix deal. Patient, time-consuming care is always the hallmark of spiritual formation work.

Another contextual situation we face is the fact that we now have a Christian entertainment industry that is masquerading as worship. How do we attend in reverence and awe before the Holy One of Israel when so much of our worship cultures focuses on amusement, diversion, and gratification? I don’t know the answer, but it is clearly one of the realities of our congregational life.

A third issue: We are dealing with an overall consumer mentality that simply dominates the American religious scene. It is a mentality that keeps the individual front and center: ‘I want what I want, when I want it, and to the

measure I want it.’ Of course, spiritual formation work teaches us to turn away from our wants and instead focus on true needs, such as the need to die to self and to take up our cross and follow hard after Jesus.

All these things and more make the work of spiritual formation in a congregational setting complicated indeed. I am sure I don’t have the answers to these complicated matters. But it is wonderful to know that having the answers is not our job. Our job is to do the work of spiritual formation, and to do this in a congregational setting.

First, that means we want to experience deeply the fellowship gathering power of spiritual formation. The church is re-formed and always re-forming. And if my heart and soul and mind and spirit are being re-formed—if I am longing to know Jesus and follow Jesus and serve Jesus and be formed into the image of Jesus—then I am powerfully drawn toward anyone and every-one who is seeking to know Jesus and follow Jesus and serve Jesus and be formed into the image of Jesus. A person filled with the beauty of Jesus has fellowship gathering power. Others are drawn irresistibly toward such a person.

Second, let us do all we can to develop the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—‘the little church within the church.’ The *ecclesiola in ecclesia* is deeply committed to the life of the people of God and is not sectarian in any way. No separation. No splitting off. No setting up a new denomination or church. We stay within the given church structures and develop little centers of light within those structures. And then we let our light shine!

Three historical expressions of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* are particularly worthy of study:

- **Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) in 17th-century Germany and his *collegia pietatis*.** Considered the father of Pietism, Spener spent his days practicing and teaching conversion of heart and holiness

of life. Those listening to him were so regularly moved by his preaching that they wanted further instruction, and asked if he would be good enough to meet with them. Spener began to hold such groups with those eager to follow Jesus, first in his house, then in other houses, and then in public buildings and so on, with the intent of instructing people who were anxious to learn and live a holy life.

- **John Wesley (1703–1791) in 18th-century England and his societies, class meetings, and bands.** These gatherings were a way to give order and discipline to new converts. The societies were for the purpose of fellowship, the class meetings were for the purpose of accountability, and the bands were for the purpose of loving and mutual confession of sin.
- **Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) in 19th-century Norway and ‘the inner mission.’** There were great renewal movements in Norway under Hauge, but—and this is crucial—Hauge urged his followers to stay in the Lutheran state church of Norway. He formed them into small structures within those churches and called their work of piety and heart formation ‘the inner mission.’

Now, this *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, this spiritual formation work, produces a certain kind of fellowship, a certain kind of community. It produces a unity of heart and soul and mind, a bond that cannot be broken—a wonder-filled caring and sharing of life together that will carry us through the most difficult circumstances.

And that leads me to my third suggestion for congregational spiritual formation: that we learn to suffer together.

I believe our time of suffering is coming. A multitude of factors will bring this to pass. For example, the hostility of the general culture to things Christian is only going to increase. We should not be surprised by this

or even try to change it. What we should be doing is building a rock-solid community life so that when suffering comes, we will not scatter. Instead, we will stand together, pray together, and suffer together regardless of what comes our way. Suffering together may well be one way God uses us for a new gathering of the people of God.

### **Back Into The World**

Finally, we come to the issue of cultural renewal, or what in theology is called the ‘cultural mandate.’ I can only hint here at what that might look like.

The devotional masters write much about training the heart in two opposite directions: *contemptus mundi*, our being torn loose from all earthly attachments and ambitions, and *amor mundi*, our being quickened to a divine but painful compassion for the world.

In the beginning, God plucks the world out of our hearts—*contemptus mundi*. Here we experience a loosening of the chains of attachment to positions of prominence and power. All our longings for social recognition, to have our name in lights, begin to appear puny and trifling. We learn to let go of all control, all managing, all manipulation. We freely and joyfully live without guile. We experience a glorious detachment from this

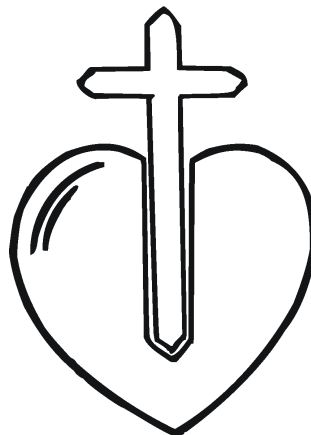
world and all it offers.

And then, just when we have become free from it all, God hurls the world back into our heart—*amor mundi*—where we and God together carry the world in infinitely tender love. We deepen in our compassion for the bruised, the broken, the dispossessed. We ache and pray and labor for others in a new way, a selfless way, a joy-filled way. Our heart is enlarged toward those on the margins. Indeed, our heart is enlarged toward all people toward all of Creation.

It was *amor mundi* that hurled Patrick back to Ireland to be the answer to its spiritual poverty. It was *amor mundi* that thrust Francis of Assisi into his worldwide ministry of compassion for all people, for all animals, for all Creation. It drove Elizabeth Fry into the hellhole of Newgate prison, and prompted William Wilberforce to labor his entire life for the abolition of slave trade. It sent Father Damien to live and suffer and die among the lepers of Molokai, and propelled Mother Teresa to minister among the poorest of the poor in India and throughout the world.

And it is *amor mundi* that compels millions of ordinary folk like you and me to minister life in Christ’s good name to our neighbor, our *nigh-bor*: ‘the person who is near us.’

**Richard Foster** is the author of many books, most recently *Life with God*. This article is a condensed and edited version of a talk given at a conference on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Celebration of Discipline.



## ***What is Spiritual Direction?***

1. Spiritual direction is an interpersonal relationship in which we learn how to grow, live, and love in the spiritual life.
  2. Spiritual direction involves a process through which one person helps another person understand what God is doing and saying.
  3. Discernment is a crucial gift in the work of spiritual direction.
  4. In spiritual direction there is absolutely no domination or control.
  5. The spiritual director/mentor/pastor guides another in spiritual things through the spiritual world by spiritual means.
  6. God has ordained that there be spiritual directors/mentors/pastors among his people. This is the structure of love in practice.
  7. Supremely, spiritual directors/mentors/pastors are persons who have a sense of being 'established' in God. Otherwise they are too dangerous to be allowed into the soul space of others.
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## ***Who is a Spiritual Director?***

1. A person who has a continuing hunger for intimacy with God.
2. A person who has an ability to forgive others at great personal loss.
3. A person who has a lively sense that God alone can satisfy the longings of the human heart.
4. A person who has a deep satisfaction in prayer.
5. A person who has a realistic assessment of personal abilities and limitations.
6. A person who has a fundamental freedom from boasting about spiritual accomplishments.
7. A person who has a demonstrated ability to live out the demands of life patiently and wisely.

—Richard Foster



# Prayers for Work

Timothy Jones (2007)

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## **A prayer to say at the beginning of work**

Merciful God and mighty Lord, were it not for Your persistent, seeking love, I might delay in acting on Your invitation to come to You in my workday. Break through my hesitancy, I pray.

Help me today to keep you at the center of my life, not on its edges. Help my faith to throw itself into the center of the fray and not stay content on the sidelines.

Turn my wandering mind into a ready heart, my longings into faith, my doctrine into deeds. I know that you wait to make my day into something it could never be without Your empowering presence and grace. Amen.

## **A prayer to say when facing a crammed to-do list**

Lord, Your prophet Isaiah tells me that in returning and rest is my salvation, in quietness and trust is my strength. Help me find a few quiet minutes to sit still, that my life will not be nonstop talk and sound, but will be filled with moments for awareness of You and Your power. Amen.

—based on Isaiah 30:15

## **A prayer to say before a meeting**

O God, grant us Your help in all our duties, in all our perplexities your guidance, In all our dangers Your protection, and in all our sorrow Your peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—Augustine (adapted by the author)

## **A prayer to say after a difficult conversation with a coworker**

O Lord God, be not far from me; take notice of me to help me, for distracting thoughts and great fears plague my soul. How can I pass through this time unhurt? ... This is my hope, my one and only encouragement: to run to You in every hardship, to trust in You, to call on You from my inmost being, and to wait patiently for Your comforting help.

—Augustine

## **Prayers for when vision and vocation sag**

O Lord God, when you allow and prompt Your servants to attempt any great matter, remind us that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of it—until it is finished—that yields the true glory; through Him that for the finishing of Your work laid down His life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Sir Francis Drake

## **A prayer for when stresses assail**

Out of the depths I cry to you. O Lord;

O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy ... I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.

My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption.

—Psalm 130:1–2, 5–7

### **A prayer for when you don't feel 'spiritual'**

Lord, I ask You to fill me with the knowledge of Your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. I pray this in order that I may live a life worthy of You and please You in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in my knowledge of You, being strengthened with Your power so that I may have great endurance and patience. Through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

—adapted from Colossians 1:9–11

### **A prayer to end the workday**

Lord, I choose to believe that even the small gestures I've done on the job carry great weight.

When my conviction lags, remind me that You took a ragtag bunch of first-century disciples and changed the course of history. Thank you for allowing me to serve my coworkers. Amen.

### **A prayer of thanks for work**

Lord, thank you that my work can provide opportunities for growth. Thank you that Your hand is with me even in mundane tasks. Enable me to enjoy brushes of Your presence even in the stressful moments. And never let me forget to thank You for giving me a job to do and providing through it what I need to live. Amen.



**Timothy Jones** is a pastor, writer, and speaker. He is author of *Workday Prayers (Loyola)* and *The Art of Prayer (WaterBrook)*.

*Prayers not attributed to others are written by the author. Some prayers are adapted from Workday Prayers: On-the-Job Meditations for Tending Your Soul, pp. 26, 96, 190, 195, 219, 224 (Loyola Press, © 2000).*



# Picture Christ

Dennis Ngien (2007)

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*Martin Luther's advice on preparing to die.*

I remember an African brother who stood in an evangelistic meeting and told how he was brought to Christ by his dying seven-year-old daughter. One day he heard her praying for his salvation, though she lay in bed very debilitated by tuberculosis and malaria.

‘Dad, do you believe in God?’ she asked as he sat beside her. ‘Oh, yes, darling; only a fool would deny God’s existence.’

‘If you believe in God, you should also believe in eternal life.’

‘Oh, yes; if there is a God, there must be eternal life.’

‘But, dad, you don’t have eternal life, for Jesus is not in your heart.’

He reported, ‘Then my little daughter begged me to kneel beside her deathbed. I recited her words as she prayed for my conversion. “O God, let Christ come into my heart. Please save my soul; give me eternal life.” ’

Not all Christians can face their death so courageously. In the past 20 years, I have conducted and preached at more than 150 memorial and funeral services. I have sat beside numerous deathbeds, with people terrified by the sight of the final conflict. For me, it is no wonder that Scripture calls death ‘the last enemy.’


This brother, now advanced in years, is battling cancer and is face to face with his own death. Knowing how fierce this last battle can be, I sent him one of the most helpful meditation guides I’ve known: Martin Luther’s ‘A Sermon on Preparing to Die.’ In this sermon, Luther provides pastoral counsel to his closest friend, Mark Schart, who was

troubled by thoughts of death. His counsel contains a great deal of wisdom for today.


## The Three Temptations

Luther believed that death becomes ominous because the devil uses it to undermine our faith. He haunts us with death in three ways.

First, the Devil typically taunts us with the remembrance that death is a sign of God’s wrath toward sinners. ‘In that way, [the devil] fills our foolish human nature with the dread of death while cultivating a love and concern for life, so that burdened with such thoughts man forgets God, flees and abhors death, and thus, in the end, is and remains disobedient to God.’



**At the last hour, the saving  
image of Christ should  
capture our attention.**



Luther’s remedy for this first temptation is to contemplate death all the more, but to do so at the right time—which is not the time of death. Instead, he exhorts us to ‘invite death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move’—that is, in our daily lives long before death threatens us. Conversely, Luther counsels Christians to banish thoughts of death at the final hour and to use that time to meditate on life.

Second, the Devil magnifies our accusing conscience by reminding us of those who were condemned to hell for lesser sins than

ours. This, too, casts us into despair, so that we forget God's grace in the last hour. Again Luther admonishes us not to deny our sinfulness, but to contemplate it during our lifetimes, as is taught in Psalm 51:3: 'My sin is ever before me.' The devil closes our eyes to our sin during our lives, just when we should be thinking of it. He then opens our eyes to the horrible reality of sin and judgment in the final hour, when our eyes should be seeing only grace.

Third, the Devil plagues us with the prospect of hell, specifically by increasing the soul's burden with haunting questions concerning election. He prods the soul into undertaking the one thing forbidden—delving into the mystery of God's will. In this undertaking, the devil 'practices his ultimate, greatest, and most cunning art and power,' for he 'sets man above God' so that we look in the wrong place for assurance of election. In this respect, delving into the mystery of election is never a good practice, but especially not when one faces the final enemy.

How do we banish these devilish images and then see only grace? Luther exhorts us to contemplate the image that saves: Jesus Christ, who 'overcame death with life.' In addition, he encourages us to contemplate the deaths of those who died in God's grace, such as the saints before us. The more one fixes one's gaze on such pictures, the more death appears 'contemptible and dead, slain and overcome in life. For Christ is nothing other than sheer life, as his saints are likewise.'

Luther says to look to Christ is to see grace, because 'the picture of grace is nothing else but that of Christ on the cross.'

Here sins are never sins, for here they are overcome and swallowed up in Christ. He takes your death upon himself and strangles it so that it may not harm you, if you believe that he does it for you and see your death in him and not in yourself. Likewise, he

also takes your sins upon himself and overcomes them with his righteousness out of sheer mercy, and if you believe that, your sins will never work you harm.

Luther also says that when facing death's agonies, we should find support in the fellowship and faith of the church.

The experience of dying, though intensely personal, cannot be handled privately without our being crushed. As each person contends with death, we should not desert him or leave him to die alone. In the deafening loneliness of death, we 'shout in the ears' of the dying to assure them of our companionship. In fact, God, Christ, angels, saints, and the entire congregation 'shout' with us. The eyes of the entire communion of saints are upon the dying to empower him to go through the unavoidable. The annihilating voice of death, then, can drive us into the arms of Christ. The voice of the law that incites sin, death, and divine wrath is replaced by the voice of the gospel. That voice is like a lamp shining in darkness until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts (see 2 Peter 1:19–20)—and it makes dying much easier.

### **Born Again**

Death, for Luther, is 'the beginning of the narrow gate and of the straight path to life' (Matthew 7:14). Although the gate is narrow, the journey is not long. Luther elaborates:

Just as an infant is born with peril and pain from the small abode of its mother's womb into this immense heaven and earth, ... so man departs this life through the narrow gate of death ... Therefore, the death of the dear saints is called a new birth, and their feast day is known in Latin as *natale*, that is, the day of their birth.

This road through the dark valley may be traveled safely when we are assured of its end. We do not have to deny the pain of grief

and death. On the contrary, it is the harsh reality of death that makes the heavenly mansion so glorious: ‘So it is that in dying we must bear this anguish and know that a large mansion and joy will follow.’

While we should be aware daily of the inevitable reality of death, we can live as

those who have been freed from the curse and sting of death. Luther wisely reminds us to ponder ‘the heavenly picture of Christ,’ for in Christ, we have passed from death to life. Death is not death to the believers whose lives are hidden with Christ in God.



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# Missionary Giants ... Or Just a Giant Need for Prayer?

Dan W. Stott (2005)

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Are missionaries prayer giants or are they just ordinary people greatly in need of prayer?

Almost two months after arriving on the mission field in Ireland, my wife, Lynda, and I wept as we huddled together in bed. Our initial expectations of overseas ministry appeared hopelessly dashed. Field relationships were a disaster. Our reality felt like sheer hell, irrespective of why, who or what had caused it. Our support network—family, friends, church—that launched us on our September journey from Philadelphia’s airport, couldn’t have seemed further away. An agonizing stretch of three thousand isolating miles of ocean stood between us.

Our nightly habit of praying together was replaced by tears. Nothing felt normal. Darkness, gloom, and the cold dampness of our Irish house surrounded us. Somehow we fell asleep.

Suddenly the phone rang around two or three a.m. On the other end I heard my sister-in-law numbly say, ‘Dad is dead.’ The news hit me like a ton of bricks. I had a great relationship with my father-in-law and considered him one of my best friends. Brokenhearted, I labored for words to tell Lynda that her father had gone to be with the Lord.

Soon after, desperation began to sink in, so I telephoned our fellow missionaries and asked for help. Immediately, they came to our aid at that early morning hour.

A day or so later, our family returned to the US, where we weren’t supposed to be for a long time. I don’t remember most details of getting there except giving my credit card to our missionary friends and asking them to buy our plane tickets. We were in a state of shock.

Our story—the rocky start on the mission field and the untimely death of a loved one—could be repeated the world over in many missionary annals. I know fellow missionaries have suffered far worse, but perhaps I’m weaker than others. A woman in a church I pastored once told me, ‘Dan, you need thicker skin!’ I’m reminded of a veteran missionary friend who told the Sunday School class I used to teach, ‘Missionaries are just ordinary people.’ Because of my experiences on the field, now I know that he was right. I am ordinary.



## **Our story—the rocky start in the mission field and the untimely death of a loved one—could be repeated the world over in missionary annals.**



Missionaries don’t escape trials, misfortune, or injustice. They may lose children, be stricken with cancer, and the list goes on. I am inclined to believe that missionaries are one of the enemy’s favorite targets because front-line ministry puts us in the crosshairs of evil minions. The kingdom of darkness hates the kingdom of light. The Apostle Paul must have known this because he reminded people of his ongoing need for others to pray for him. Imagine that: the spiritual leader, Paul, needed prayer giants in his life. Maybe I’m in good company.


Acknowledging my seesaw track record with prayer, I bravely enrolled in a one-week doctoral course on the role of prayer in ministry. I was the only missionary attending the class, but the mix of students was fan-

tastic. The other twelve men were pastors of American-based churches—a great group of mature leaders.

In the middle of the prayer course week, I had lunch with two classmates. Before devouring our Philly hoagies, the waitress unintentionally interrupted our blessing over the meal. And after we joked about how frequently that can happen, I ventured to tell my hoagie-mates how I struggled with my prayer life. I got little sympathy, so I quickly mused, ‘I guess I’m eating with two prayer giants.’ They laughed and shrugged it off.


When class resumed after lunch, I raised my hand. I sucked up the courage to share with the class how I had struggled with my own prayer life. Wow, did I get a lot of looks! I even dared to tell the professor that his requirement of thirty consolidated minutes for prayer each day over a six-month period was a stretch for me. My ship was sunk—say goodbye to a stellar grade point average!

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**Are missionaries more  
vulnerable to prayer failure?  
Do missionaries, God’s mighty  
army, go through dry seasons  
of prayerlessness?**

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I’ve come to a point in my life where I’m tired of trying to look like the missionary giant. Somehow I thought sharing my battle might improve my prayer life, so I willingly identified myself as the person with the problem. Not one other student admitted to the same struggle. Maybe I really am a spiritual oddball. But that is exactly what I’m driving at—I’m not a missionary prayer giant, but I am a needy person with a giant need of prayer.

Undoubtedly, my first two months on the mission field thus re-exposed my human weakness and why my need for prayer. That

early mission field chaos and my father-in-law’s death uncorked me. I’m sure that many people upheld us in prayer. Frankly, I know that I can’t make it alone even though I also believe God promises never to abandon me. Frail I am, and that’s why I desperately need people to pray for me faithfully. Sometimes it feels as if hell is on the loose on the mission field. Is it wrong to put it that way?

Thank God for elderly grandmothers and godly parents who faithfully pray for their missionary prayer midget—me. I praise the Lord for Mrs. S in Texas, now in her nineties, because I know she shakes God’s throne room with her petitions. I am humbled by supporters who tell me, ‘I’ve been praying for you,’ when I can’t remember the last time I prayed for them. Woe is me!

I am amazed to think that I am numbered among other missionaries who generally *do* have the reputation of being praying people. Maybe that’s true of most missionaries, but if so, I may be on the low end of the bell curve. But on the other hand, maybe because missionaries write prayer letters and talk so much about needing prayer, we’ve wrongly convinced ourselves and others of our great prayer lives when we actually wrestle and desire to improve them. Where are you on the prayer bell curve?

Since we moved to the field, my wife had also found it harder to pray. She claims that she feels direct spiritual opposition—like running head first into a big wall. Are missionaries just more vulnerable to prayer failure? Do missionaries, God’s mighty army, go through many dry seasons of prayerlessness? Are we willing to admit to prayer listlessness and lethargy? I will. Will anyone else join me in that confession?

Deep down, I want to believe among God’s army of persevering missionaries there are prayer giants. Carey, Taylor, Müller—we know how they prayed, but what about us? There must be prayer warriors in today’s missionary core because the advance of

God's kingdom depends on calloused knees. I don't know if it's possible for someone to survive victoriously a lifetime of faithful missionary service minus prayer. Yet I'm not ready to say that being a missionary has made my prayer life any easier.

My intimacy with God in prayer is far more confusing now that I live cross-culturally. I've wrestled to understand why—both psychologically and spiritually. At times I feel I don't know myself anymore—like my body is turned inside out. Is that culture shock? All I know is that it can affect my prayer life. Many times mental confusion coupled with the pressure of kingdom ministry has literally driven me to my prayer closet. I know that my thoughts and actions are less than sane and I need to be alone with God. Out of desperation, I know that the safest place for me to go is in God's presence where his Holy Spirit will restore me—where I can regain his perspective.

Our mission leaders' visit to our home came at a time when Lynda and I needed them to pray for us—and they did. They laid hands on us and committed us to the Lord. Talking about our field strategy, recruiting more missionaries, home office updates, the changes to healthcare and our pension are all important subjects, but not when you need prayer. Thank God they had the insight to do the more important thing: pray for us. Later, I remembered to thank God for answering my request for prayer. I guess God listens to prayer ants.

I need prayer giants to surround me. A deeply spiritual woman in our church has done that for me more than once. She probably has no idea how much I appreciated that she laid hands on me and asked God to heal me of a sickness I had one Sunday morning. The meeting room was crowded with church people drinking tea and coffee and chatting, but suddenly I felt her presence and the Spirit of God. Her prayer penetrated my being and lifted me with her to the gates

of heaven. With 'Jesus' name' God's power descended and answered her petition—I felt much better and my health continued to improve throughout the day.

I am attracted to prayer giants like her. Yet I wonder, are we missionaries prepared to humble ourselves and admit that we are the ones who need the most prayers? So much ministry is about giving to others, that we automatically give. Sometimes we give so much, we run on empty. Then we crash and become a missionary statistic as 'one of those people who couldn't hack it.' How sad. But how would it have been different if we had vulnerably dared to ask others to pray for us because we felt weak? Are we willing to look for prayer giants who are taller than us?



**Out of desperation, I know that the safest place for me to go is in God's presence where his Holy Spirit will restore me.**



Prayer is a key weapon in spiritual warfare. Before the Lord took a very special spiritual brother back to the United States, John (a pseudonym) and I often disappeared into his tiny studio to sink to our knees. I loved to listen to him pray. John knew how to pray with passion, and tears were easy for him. I was blessed by how he prayed because his prayers taught me that he had an intimacy with God worth pursuing. The answers we discovered during our time praying never ceased to amaze me.

John was a momentary prayer giant in my life on the mission field. Much of our praying took place in my first year, and I believe it kept me going when running away would have been easier. I needed him more than I think he needed me. To this day, he is one of the first persons I will call for prayer in an hour of need.

In fall 2002, our circumstances were again unpleasant. I bottomed out, and my cup was empty. Was God listening? The telephone rang when I desperately wanted to hear John's voice. 'Hey, I've been trying to reach you for weeks, but couldn't seem to get through.' (Our phone number had changed.)

I poured out my heart and hurt and asked my prayer giant friend to pray for me. He began to pray, and I could almost imagine being back in his tiny office, prostrate on the floor. The Spirit of God worked across the phone line and some five thousand miles of physical separation. I was not alone. A prayer giant was praying for me when I needed it.

While I know that I'm not a prayer giant, as a father of four, I'm teaching my children to be prayer giants. At low points on the mission field, I have purposely invited any of my children to pray for me. And as I told my classmates in the prayer course, 'God listens to children. That's why I ask my children to pray for me.'

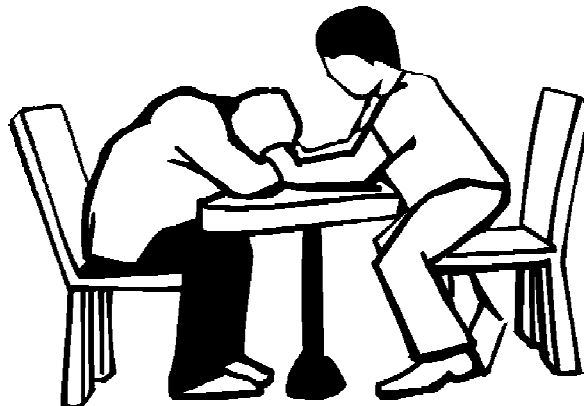
When I'm physically ill, I intentionally ask the head that peeks at me from behind the

door, 'Come in here. I want you to pray for Daddy.' I may wrestle with prayer, but that's never changed my belief that prayer works. I know it does. Children can be prayer giants.

I also know how much it means to both Lynda and me in our many times of praying together. Beyond our nightly prayer routine, we've had to act as prayer giants for each other when one of us is hurting. Perhaps because I am a man, I've had to learn how to be vulnerable. I'm fascinated by my wife's responsiveness. Vulnerability doesn't feel natural to me, but I know it's the right thing to do, so I keep trying. I want to be a prayer giant.

Who are your prayer giants? Ultimately, we missionaries need more prayer than the ministries that drive us. We can't afford to lose the power of prayer from our arsenal that wages war against the world, the flesh, and the forces of darkness. The prayer giants in our lives are not ourselves, but the prayer supporters, family members and close friends who care for us and stand behind us. These people are our heroes, and our giants.

**Dan Stott** and his wife Lynda have been church planters in the Republic of Ireland with The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) since 1998. He is pursuing a Doctorate in Ministry degree at Dallas Theological Seminary.



**‘Enable me to love you, my God, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my strength ...’**



# Susanna Wesley: Creating a Spiritual Legacy

Cheri Fuller (2004)

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As a wife and mother, Susanna Wesley wove prayer through her everyday life. Nineteen children were born to her between 1690 and 1709 (only nine lived into adulthood). She was just as methodical in her prayer life as she was in her disciplined teaching and training of her children from earliest infancy. Each day before class, she set aside an hour for reading the Bible and praying, and then led her children in singing Psalms.

After her ninth child was born, Susanna decided no longer to set aside one hour for devotions and prayer. Now she set aside two! During that sacred time, she meditated on Scripture and prayed, allowing nothing to prevent her from her time with God. The example she set was one her children would not forget, and the adults who knew her attributed her spiritual legacy of courage and peace to this time with God each day.

Susanna didn't have an easy life. In addition to suffering a lingering sickness, she was married to a difficult and at times tyrannical man, Samuel. She faced mounting financial problems because of his debts. Their family home burned two times, destroying almost everything. Yet her strength was in God, and her purpose was clear: to raise children whose lives would glorify Christ.

She knew, however, that their spiritual maturity would come from God. Her biography describes how she would tuck her children in bed each night and lift her candle to gaze

upon each face. As she did so, she prayed that God would enable her to so inspire her children that they could be used by Him to change the world.

Susanna Wesley's prayers impacted not only her children, but touched future generations as well. Her son John became a powerful preacher whose sermons brought awakening both in England and the colonies, and he founded the Methodist movement which culminated in the organization of the Methodist Church. Her son Charles wrote hundreds of hymns and brought the gospel to hundreds of people.

Susanna was not perfect. She struggled with doubt and confusion. At times, she relied on human works for salvation rather than the finished work of Christ (until at age 71, in the communion cup offered by Charles, she realized in a deep, personal way her sins were forgiven). But her many written prayers reveal a heart wholly committed to God and committed to prayer: 'Help me, O Lord, to make true use of all disappointments and calamities in this life, in such a way that they may unite my heart more closely with you ... Enable me to love you, my God, with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my strength; so to love you as to desire you; so to desire you as to be uneasy without you, without your favor, without some such resemblance to you as my nature in this imperfect state can bear. Amen.'

**Cheri Fuller** is the author of *The One-Year Book of Praying through the Bible*, *When Mothers Pray*, and 30 other books.

# Suggested Reading

## ***A Spiritual Inventory and Spiritual Markers***

### **Periodical**

*Pray!* magazine, formerly published by NavPress, was a tool (1) to guide believers into a deeper relationship with Christ through prayer; and (2) to help believers pray more powerfully and effectively. To get a downloadable prayer library, go to [www.navpress.com/prayerlibrary.aspx](http://www.navpress.com/prayerlibrary.aspx).

### **Books**

Anderson, Fil. 2010. *Breaking the rules*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

When the author found himself spiritually bankrupt and emotionally drained, relief came by learning to *be with* God rather than *doing for* God.

Baab, Lynn M. 2002. *A renewed spirituality: Finding fresh paths at midlife*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

Midlife brings changes, and sometimes in your personal walk with God, things may become ho-hum. But this season can also be a time of discovery and new beginnings.

Bezek, Cynthia Hyle. 2008. *Come away with me: A guide to prayer retreats*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: *Pray!* Books, NavPress.

Is spiritual refreshment a luxury or a necessity? God has more for us than working on empty, and he longs to be our source of renewal. This is a practical, easy-to-follow guide on how to create your own personal getaway. Jesus found time to be with the Father, and so can you.

Bevere, John. 2004. *Drawing near: A life of intimacy with God*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson.

Bevere reveals how Scripture repeatedly declares that God desires a close relationship with us. When we draw near to him, we find the presence of the Holy Spirit to be the most energizing and transforming experience we have ever known.

Blackaby, Henry and Norman. 2006. *Experiencing prayer with Jesus: The power of His presence and example*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers.

This 2006 U.S. National Day of Prayer book will revolutionize your prayer life. The One who loved us to his death continues to pursue us, humbly laying his heart over ours. His presence and power will be with us, and we will be changed forever.

Bright, Bill. 2003. *The journey home: Finishing with joy*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson.

Even as he faced death, Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, never wavered in his faith. His book is a powerful, inspiring story of knowing God's purposes amid personal struggles as he shares his final thoughts. Dr. Bright went to heaven in July, 2003.

Dean, Jennifer Kennedy. 2004. *When you hurt and when HE heals: Experiencing the surprising power of prayer*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody.

Do you feel unloved and unlovable? Have you been hurt by painful relationships? Are you trapped by your past? Is life just too hard? *Open your life to the Healer!*

Duke, Dee with Brian Smith. 2004. *Prayer quest: Breaking through to your God-given dreams and destiny*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: Pray! Books, NavPress.

The book will help you break through all the things holding you back from understanding your God-given dreams, clarifying them, and realizing them.

Foster, Richard J. and Gayle D. Beebe. 2009. *Longing for God: Seven paths of Christian devotion*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

The authors introduce us to people from the past who have known God deeply. Each points the way to one of seven paths to intimacy with God developed throughout Christian history.

Hontz, Marilyn. 2004. *Listening for God*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.

God taught the author to recognize his voice in scripture, prayer, and the mundane moments of life. God replaced her anxiety and lack of direction, and he assured her of his unfailing love.

Lamb, Joy. 2007. *The sword of the Spirit: The word of God*. 7th ed. Jacksonville, Fla.: Lamb's Books, Inc.

This 'handbook of praying God's Word' is not a book to read, but one to be used daily. It is a powerful tool to use when you pray individually or in a group, for Word-centered praying, led by the Spirit, is an absolute must for effective intercession.

Lotz, Anne Graham. 2004. *Why? Trusting God when you don't understand*. Nashville, Tenn.: W Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson.

Can you keep on trusting God when bad things are happening—when the pain is sharp, the doubt is deep, and it's impossible to see the sense in it all?

Manning, Brennan. 2002. *Abba's child*. Rev. ed. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress.

God is calling us to take our mask off and come openly to him. He longs for us to know in the depth of our being that he loves us and accepts us as we are. When we are our true selves, we can finally claim our identity as God's child—*Abba's child*.

Murray, Andrew. 2002. *Living a prayerful life*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Bethany House.

This classic from a prayer giant of the nineteenth century is as applicable now as then, and will show the steps to developing a vital spiritual life through prayer.

Tippit, Sammy. 2006. *Praying for your family: An eternal legacy*. San Antonio, Tex.: Sammy Tippit Ministries.

The book provides hope for your home. You will read inspirational testimonies, learn foundational principles, and apply truths that will enable you to pray effectively for your family.

Wubbels, Lance. Ed. *Christian living classics: 30-day devotional treasures*. Lynnwood, Wash.: Emerald Books.

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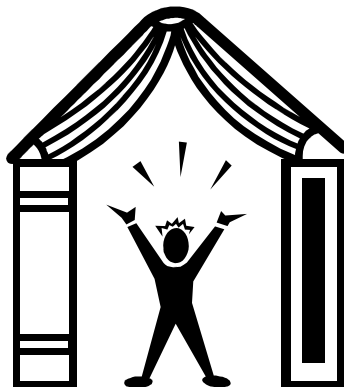
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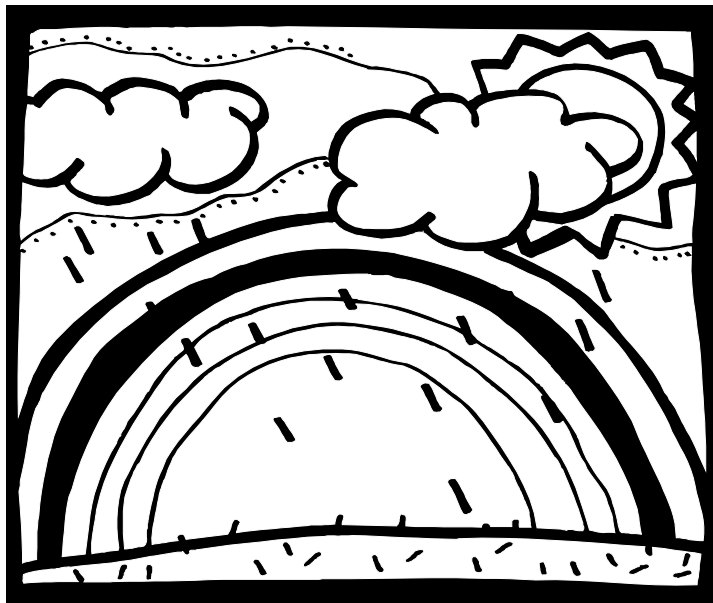
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**To everything there is a season, A time  
for every purpose under heaven: A time to  
weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn,  
And a time to dance ...**

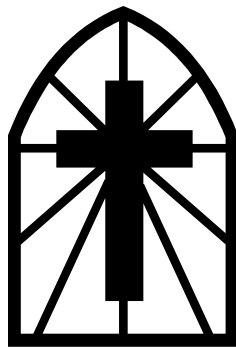
*Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4  
New King James Version*



## ***Notes***



**So, if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, *act* like it ... don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be *alert* to what's going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from *His* perspective.**



*Colossians 3:1-2*

*The Message*





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