



# The Spiritual Formation Workbook

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## Passionate About Spirituality?

What lies between these pages are some of the ancient resources that have sustained Christians across the world over the past 2,000 years.

The booklet is inspired by the writer Richard Foster who wrote in his book 'Celebration of Discipline'...

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”

If you are looking for ways to grow deeper in God, read on...

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# Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

## Section 1

### Introduction

- Why do so few people realise how deeply loved they are by God?
- How can we come to realise more deeply how much God truly loves us?
- How can the church express and demonstrate more fully God's deep love for the world?

The spiritual adventure of discovering God's love can be found in three places...

**Solitude:** Jesus invited His disciples to come away with him to a lonely place.

**Scripture:** Peter says, 'Where else can we go, You have the words of eternal life.'

**Service:** Jesus said 'I did not come to be served but to serve, go and do likewise'.

I believe a life infused with these three ingredients is a godly life; something we are all called to live more deeply. The hallmarks of such a life are these three qualities...

**Holiness:** it is a life centred on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

**Humility:** it is a life lived upon a trust in the grace, forgiveness and love that Jesus Christ has for each of us.

**Hospitality:** the longer I live, the more I look into scripture and observe the lives of the truly godly – it is a life open and available to others in a free, generous and kind spirit which is deeply inspiring and attractive.

Helping people to become more aware of God's deep love for them is a big challenge, even if easy to say, but a necessary one to undertake if the Christian life of our churches is to continue to develop as it should. In seeking to make ourselves and others more fully Christian, we should remember the old prayer which says, 'Yes Lord, and begin with me'.

# Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

## Section 2

### A Spiritual MOT

#### **History**

##### **Beginnings...**

Think back to when you were first aware of being on the journey of faith. When and how did you become a Christian?

##### **The journey so far...**

What have been the most difficult or testing times so far?

Think of two or more major milestones or highlights along the way. Why were these important?

In what ways do you feel God has equipped you to serve Him?

## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church**

### **Section 2**

#### **Your Present Situation**

##### **In relationship with God...**

What are the positive factors in your relationship with God?

What, if anything, is hampering your relationship with Him?

What do you think might help?

Do you have a sense of God's calling in your life? If so, what is it?

## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 2**

### **Home, friendship and family...**

How settled is your home life? Are there any aspects you would like to be different?

Who are your closest friends?

In what ways do such relationships help or hinder your relationship with God?

Where do you meet people who are not yet Christians?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 2

### Occupation...

What is your occupation (the main activity you undertake, which is not a leisure activity or a hobby)?

On a scale of one to ten, ten being extremely satisfying, how satisfying do you find your occupation?

You may want to explain your answer.

How does faith affect your occupation?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 2

### Hobbies/interests/relaxation...

If you had a whole day just for yourself, how would you choose to spend it?

To what extent are you content with the balance between occupation and relaxation in your life?

Is there a leisure activity that you would like to try?



## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church**

### **Section 2**

#### **The Future**

##### **The future...**

Looking ahead five years, are there aspects of your life that you would like to be different? If so, what are they?

What would be the most exciting thing you can imagine God asking you to do?

What would be the hardest thing you can imagine God asking you to do?

##### **Practicalities...**

Are there any other relevant matters, not covered by the above questions that you would like to discuss?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 2

### **Action points...**

Use this space for your action points after you have reflected on your answers with someone else.

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

### Section 3

#### Prayer

##### Where to begin?

God communicates His presence to us through the whole fabric of life but nearly always shyly. God is always coming towards us, at every moment. Our task is to be more attentive to the coming, to listen between the lines, to catch the silent music.

‘He may be hidden but He is not hiding.’

“The very moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists of sharing them all back and in listening to that other point of view, letting that other larger, stranger, quieter life come flowing in. We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us.”

*C. S. Lewis*

“Lord, let your blessing be upon me as I begin this day with You. Confirm me in the truth by which I rightly live. Confront me with the trust from which I wrongly turn. I ask not for what I want but for what you know I need as I offer this day and myself for You and to You.”

*Iona*

##### Prayer and the Bible

Take either a chapter of one of the gospels, Paul’s letters or one of the Psalms each day.

1. **Read** slowly and attentively, until a phrase or word or a whole verse arrests you. A phrase may pop up and ask to be taken more seriously.
2. **Reflect** – chew on this particular morsel, repeat it, roll it around in the mind, look at it from this way and that, repeat it again, gently suck all the goodness out of it. Allowing the meaning of the phrase to sink slowly from your head to your heart. Don’t force it; just let the significance of those words emerge naturally within, you, taste the good news.
3. **Respond** – when this process has come to a natural end move into praying the thoughts and insights which have welled up inside you. This may mean you want to give thanks, or say sorry, or make a resolution before God, or simply carry a burden silently to Him.
4. **Rest** – this is the stage of stillness that flows out of prayer as the words run out and rest and silence take over.

##### Prayer at the End of the Day

For many people this is a good time to pray because there is plenty of stuff to pray about. In particular this is a good time to review the day, to see it in the light of God and so perhaps to grow in personal

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

### Section 4

and spiritual awareness. By looking back at the day thoughtfully and prayerfully we can become more aware of God's footprints through the day and can grow to know ourselves better.

1. First be still and remember God.
  
2. Ask God to shine His light over the day and into your heart so you can see clearly what is going on.
  
3. Think through the day not just in the events, but also your feelings. Where were you joyful, sad, fearful, angry, confused? Why might that be?

God guides us through our moods and feelings. Normally, when emotions surface, as we notice what is just under the surface, like tides under the waves, God can speak to us about our true state and the truth of our lives.

Think about what you did well today and give thanks. Also think about where you turned away from God at particular points and ask for forgiveness and new strength.

"God, grant me the grace to accept with serenity  
The things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference,  
Living one day at a time,  
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace  
Taking as You did this sinful world as it is,  
Not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If I surrender to Your will,  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next."

*Reinhold Neibuhr*

## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church**

### **Section 4**

#### **The Practice of the Discipline**

A Coventry Way is a common discipline, which is intended to be a structure to help us love God, one another and the world. These common factors should characterise all Christian people. It does not require of those who share it anything harsh or additional to what should be normal, honest Christian belief and behaviour. However, the particular yeast that permeates each discipline is Reconciliation.

It is a basis to which can be added variations and details according to the circumstances and preferences of each member.

A Coventry Way calls for seven personal commitments. These may be summed up in the seven 'S's.

They can be practised daily or assigned particularly one to each day of the week.

- i) Scripture
- ii) Supplication
- iii) Silence
- iv) Study
- v) Service
- vi) Sharing
- vii) Stewardship
- viii)

Each of them should be explored and lived out under the particular banner of Reconciliation. Let us take each in turn:

#### **i) Scripture**

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."

*2 Timothy 3 v16-17*

Following A Coventry Way involves commitment to the devotional reading of scripture and response in prayer. How this will happen must vary according to the circumstances of life. Those commuting to work, or with young children keeping them awake at night, or retired or even ill, will all find different routines. The essence of the commitment is regularity.

The devotional reading of Scripture is more than studying the Bible. It is the process of listening to what God says to us through it. To do this we need to read systematically, either using our own scheme or one someone suggests, spend time reflecting on the passage and then seek to apply its truths to our lives and our world.

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#### Practical Tips

- Many people who commute read the Bible and pray on the way to work. One person goes to a Benedictine monastery for the weekend before Lent. Another wakes in the night and prays for an hour before going back to sleep. It is all a matter of what each person can manage, given their lifestyle.
- If possible use a system for reading the Bible, published by someone like the Bible Reading Fellowship or Scripture Union, or on the Internet at [www.365promises.com](http://www.365promises.com) or [www.wordlive.org](http://www.wordlive.org)

#### ii) Supplication

“Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.”

*Matthew 7 v7*

Reading the scriptures will always lead to and intermingle with prayer. This will usually start with praise and thanksgiving. It may lead to confession but it should include supplication.

Supplication is a form of prayer bringing specific requests to God. This should cover not only our own circumstances and people around us, but take in items on the news and situations far away. It may be based around a formal book of prayer or be spontaneous and impromptu.

All Christians should also be encouraged to seek one person with whom they can meet and pray. This may be a sentence of prayer with a spouse before sleep or a regular meeting with a friend.

- Be short.
- Excessive ambition is the enemy of prayer.
- Read a little. Talk a little. Pray a little.

Some may want to seek out those who can guide or direct us spiritually, perhaps meeting with them every few months.

Above all, be thankful for the reconciliation that we have through Christ, whatever we have done, whenever we turn back to Him in repentance. In the knowledge and experience of His forgiveness which we strengthen through Scripture and prayer, we become better equipped to forgive others.

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#### Practical Tips

- Make and use a list of items for prayer.
- A church may be a good place for a half day of quiet prayer.

#### iii) Silence

“Be still and know that I am God”

*Psalms 46 v10*

To ‘hush the spirit’ (as the Quakers say) is an indispensable part of the disciplined life. Without this deliberate withdrawal, one is buffeted by the pressures which demand immediate responses. The pressures are as frequent and varied as the people one meets, the news one reads and the situations with which one is confronted.

Do not be afraid of silence or of being alone. The regular practice of a period of silence will help a sound patient judgment to grow. We need to be people of peace if we are to bring peace to the world.

Quiet and retreat, if only perhaps a two-day retreat once a year, are also essential for reflection and renewal. Quiet may come from spending time (perhaps just an hour, perhaps a day) regularly alone with God; perhaps using a journal, perhaps just praying, perhaps just thinking about issues with Him. Retreat may often be arranged and guided by the local church or to somewhere that makes a longer period of reflection possible.

#### Practical Tips

- Find a quiet place and determine to be silent there for 10-50 minutes on a regular basis.
- Try a silent retreat.

**Spiritual Solitude** is a time and place for ourselves where we are not to be bothered by other people, think our thoughts, express our own complaints, do our own thing privately and where we gather new strength to continue ongoing competition in life. The solitude that is a stepping stone to the heart of God is a place of conversion, transformation and struggle. In solitude we get rid of the scaffolding of our lives – the family and friends, the telephone calls, meetings, music, books – leaving just ourselves and nothingness before God.

Into this emptiness thoughts, ideas and worries crowd in as we struggle to keep our thoughts focused on God. Our primary task in solitude is not to pay attention to the many faces/forces

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that assail us but to keep our minds and hearts on Him who is our Saviour. We enter into solitude, first of all, to meet with our Lord and to be with Him and Him alone.

**Silence is the way to make solitude a reality.** Solitude is not being alone; it is being alone with God.

Silence is the practice of quieting every inner voice and outer voice to attend to God.

Without silence, the word of God cannot bear fruit. As long as our hearts and minds are filled with words of our own making, there is no space for the word of God to enter deeply into our hearts – to become our inner guide and to bear fruit in our lives.

For many, silence creates itchiness and nervousness; it seems empty and hollow; it is like a gaping hole that might swallow them up. But with practice, empty silence can become full silence; anxious silence can become peaceful silence; restless silence becomes restful silence. It can become a place where real encounter with the living Father can take place.

Silence is a quality of the heart.

Practising silence helps us to concentrate on the real but often hidden event of God's active presence in our lives.

**Solitude and silence lead us to the prayer of rest** which is the prayer of the heart – 'prayer that does not allow us to limit our relationship with God with interesting words or pious emotions – it opens the eyes of our soul to the truth of ourselves as well as the truth of God.'

Prayer can so often be an activity of the mind; speaking with God, talking to God, thinking about God rather than listening to God. The crisis of our prayer life is that our mind may be filled with ideas of God while our heart remains far from Him. Prayer is standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart, at that point of our being, where there are no divisions or distractions and where we feel at one with God. How do we practice this?

The prayer of the heart is nurtured by **short, simple prayers** – one word or phrase - a simple, easily repeated prayer can slowly empty out our crowded interior life and create the quiet space where we can dwell with God. These simple prayers can become an **unceasing** part of us – we pray without ceasing. The prayer of the heart **includes all our concerns**. The power of prayer of the heart is precisely that through it, all that is on our mind becomes prayer. Prayer is about listening and waiting. Wasting time with God!



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#### Be Still

From 'Woven in Prayer' by Angela Ashwin (Canterbury Press, Norwich page 182)

Lord in these moments of quiet, with the rhythm of my breathing...

I breathe in your Spirit Lord:

I breathe in Your peace:

I breathe in Your stillness:

I breathe in Your light.

Breathe on me Spirit of Jesus and help me to be aware of Your calm presence throughout my life.

God of peace

Relax the tensions of my body...

Still the anxieties of my mind...

Calm the storms of my heart...

Give me the courage to wait...

Let peace flow in me...

Through me...

From me...

The deep, deep peace of God.

"More than all things love silence: it brings fruit that the tongue cannot describe. In the beginning we have to force ourselves to be silent. But then there is born something that draws us to silence. May God give you an experience of this 'something' that is born of silence. If only you practise this, untold light will dawn on you in consequence...after a while a certain sweetness is born in the heart of this exercise and the body is drawn almost by force to be remain silent."

*Isaac of Nineveh (Bishop of Nineveh, 7<sup>th</sup> Century)*

Prayers from the Daily Office Remembering God's presence throughout the day by Peter Scazzero, Willow Creek

Lord, you know how difficult it is for me to be in silence before You. It feels, at times, almost impossible with the demands that crowd into my head and the noise in and around me. I invite You to lead me to a quiet, silent place before You, to a place where I can hear Your small, still voice. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Father, I know how often I am carried away by too many concerns and demands and projects. I have felt the violence this does to my soul. Deliver me from this whirlwind around me and in me. Heal my tired and weary spirit, allowing the wisdom that comes from rest in You to flow deep within me.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

#### iv) Study

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”

*Psalm 119 v105*

A Coventry Way commits us to study the Scriptures, the Christian faith and to study and reflect on the world around; to discern vocation to and practise of a life of reconciliation. Christians need to be well informed, ready always to answer with graciousness and respect questions that are put to them about the hope that they have in Christ (*1 Peter 3 v15*). This may be organised in small groups, but ought also to be important for each person.

The nature of study will vary according to circumstances, resources and the needs of each person. Study can be a threatening word bringing to mind scholars and libraries. The wisdom books of the Old Testament paint a different picture. Study in this case is the process of reflecting on the world and its problems, and on their relation to God.

Each should be aiming to study in at least three areas:

- God
- How to live in the culture and place in which we find ourselves
- Reconciliation
- 

#### **Practical Tips**

- Read a serious newspaper once a week, or listen to a radio programme on current affairs, or go to hear someone speak who knows about an area of controversy or interest
- When you have read or listened, pray, look at the Bible and think about what a Christian response might be. Research what other Christians have said on the subject. Remember that Christian leaders can be prejudiced or biased.
- In any case think about how reconciliation might be related to the issue.

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#### v) Service

“Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”

*Mark 10 v43-45*

#### Practical Tips

- Take time to decide how you might serve others.
- Review this commitment regularly.

#### vi) Sharing

“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

*Hebrews 13 v16*

A Ministry of Reconciliation commits us to a life of sharing:

##### 1) Sharing the Home

All Christian virtues must first be honestly worked out in the home. Never allow a day to end with a quarrel unhealed by reconciliation through Christ’s forgiveness.

No matter how busy one is in one’s work, it is required of us that we witness daily to our love for one another in our homes.

If married, we should try to spend some time each day in relaxed fellowship and recreation with members of our family and not neglect our family under pressure of work.

If unmarried, we should recognise our obligations towards members of our household.

“We are members of one another” and must always be mindful of each other’s needs and isolation.

Hospitality has always been a key ingredient in Christian discipleship. Anyone committed to A Coventry Way will want to use their home for Christ by sharing it with others as appropriate.

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#### 2) Sharing Skills

*1 Corinthians 12*

All of us have gifts, talent and skills. We can use them for ourselves or for others. In our common discipline, we seek as far as possible to use our gifts for the benefit of others.

#### 3) Sharing Possessions

*2 Corinthians 8 and 9*

However poor, each of us has some possessions. Those committed to A Coventry Way are also committed to sharing their possessions with others.

#### 4) Sharing the Faith

*1 Peter 3 v15*

All of us should commit to sharing our Christian faith with others.

The basis of all reconciliation is reconciliation with God. Christians are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ, so that others may find faith in God through Him, but at the same time to do so as reconcilers, with respect and grace.

#### **Practical Tips**

- It is helpful to think through how you explain what being a Christian means to you, in simple and unreligious terms. We should be ready to explain why it is so important if asked.
- Practice telling your story of forgiveness through Christ and the way He has transformed your life.

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### Section 4

#### 5) Sharing our Lives Together as Christians

*Acts 2 v42*

Christians belong to the family of God. As such, they should seek to meet together for worship and fellowship. Personal prayer is only fully realised when it pours over into the corporate prayer of the Church. All should belong to a local Church and will meet with fellow believers on a regular basis.

Each of us is called by the love of God to know and serve Christ, but also to serve Him in serving one another. This is the command of Jesus. Part of our personal commitment to Christ is thus a commitment to other Christians, not neglecting to meet them both in small groups and in worship together. The small group is where we develop the skills of listening to each other, supporting each other and seeking to learn from each other, not merely convince the other of our own opinion.

#### 6) Stewardship

“The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

*2 Corinthians 9 v6*

Disciples of Jesus should be careful to love within their means and to control their income and expenditure with discipline.

They recognise that all they have comes from God and that they are but stewards of His possessions.

They give generously, sacrificially and cheerfully to the work of God’s Church.

They seek to live a simpler lifestyle.

They are committed to caring for God’s planet.

#### **Practical Tips**

- Make an annual budget of your income and expenditure.
- Plan to give a tithe to your local Christian community.
- What else may you give?
- Take active steps to recycle goods you use.
- Be involved in some eco-friendly activity.



## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

### Section 5

#### The Litany of Reconciliation

The Litany of Reconciliation is an acknowledgement of our need for forgiveness. It is based on the seven deadly sins and uses the refrain first scratched on the wall behind the altar of the ruined cathedral – “Father forgive.” It is used each week day at 12 noon in Coventry Cathedral.

Being part of the Community of the Cross of Nails involves a commitment to reflect upon these sins and our need for forgiveness and to praying the litany on a regular basis.

#### **All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God**

The hatred which divides nation from nation,  
Race from race, class from class,  
**Father forgive**

The covetous desires of people and nations  
to possess what is not their own  
**Father forgive**

The greed which exploits the work of human hands  
and lays waste the earth  
**Father forgive**

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others  
**Father forgive**

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned,  
the homeless, the refugee  
**Father forgive**

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men,  
women and children  
**Father forgive**

The pride which leads to trust in ourselves  
and not in God  
**Father forgive**

**Be kind to one another; tender-hearted,  
forgiving one another;  
as God in Christ forgave you.**





# Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

## Section 6

### Journalling

A journal can be a mirror of the self. It creates and maintains a private record of your observations and intuitions, your thoughts and feelings, and your reflections on all of these.

A spiritual journal is not just a book of prayers or personal Bible meditation but, by paying attention to our relationship with God in all things, it is a central factor in the discovery of who we truly are.

The only rule for a successful journal is that there are no rules. In your journal you are completely free to do your own thing. There are no limits on the content of your journal. The material need not be original to you, e.g. quotations, photographs and drawings.

The only rule in terms of how often you write: whenever you feel like doing so. For most people, the search for God, for personal identity, for threads of continuity in their lives will be the major consideration.

Here are three quotations from distinguished Christian writers that give a flavour of the diversity of the approach:

Henri Nouwen says – “I have little to say about events, good or bad, creative or destructive but much about the way I remember them – that is, the way I start giving them form in the story of my life.”

Bishop John Robinson described a journal as – ‘Something very different from a diary, which has always oppressed me. There you feel you have got to reveal something every day, whether there is something worth saying or not.’

Tristine Rainer gives this advice – ‘Write fast, write everything, include everything, write from your feelings, write from your body, accept whatever comes.’

It is worth adding that a spiritual journal, since it puts our life into the context of our relationship with God, ought to be written in the context of prayer and meditation on the events of the day. One approach might be to spend time in silence and then record what is uppermost in your mind as a source of discovery, reflection and integration and self examination. As important as the entries themselves is the practice of re-reading your journal at more or less regular intervals.

Carl Jung, the father of the psychotherapeutic movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneered this method of journaling as a way of understanding himself better through his unconscious and dream life. He made four helpful categories of the raw material of his journal.

1. Descriptive
2. Brainstorming
3. Reflective
4. Cathartic

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Ira Progoff, developed Jung's approach to journaling by using powerful questions as a pathway to discovery e.g. where am I now in my life? He applies it to our personal relationships, the way we feel about our work, our leisure, our body, the events that affect us, the groups that are significant to us and our life experience. The approach has 2 key elements:

1. Asking a direct question to a particular aspect of your life e.g. how well am I doing as a Christian?
2. Allowing our mind to capture in writing various insights and then focussing on what we regard as the most significant.

Another rich area of wisdom is to constantly be reflecting on our past; the events and people who have made us who we are; the decisions we have made; our successes and failures. The end result is a deepened understanding of how we have become who we are. An important aspect of this dimension is working with the un-lived possibilities of our life.

The Christian goal of journal keeping is best summarised in terms of our life in Christ and to reflect on our Christian journey. Historically, the Christian journal has been a vehicle of honest self appraisal before God. Keeping a journal can be a powerful discipline in developing one's inner life e.g. as we read and meditate upon scripture we might want to keep our journals open beside scripture.

You might want to use your journal to record your prayer concerns: specific requests and answers to prayer. It can be used to clarify the matters that really concern you, to focus either the direction of your life or the emphasis in your prayers.

Closely related to prayer is the whole area of divine guidance. Once again the journal is a suitable vehicle for working out important decisions in God's presence, and recognising retrospectively how God has helped you. One practice I have followed for many years is to note five things I want to thank God for each day.

Finally, here is a list of six Christian approaches to journaling:

1. Journalling the events of our lives can help us see God in all of life.
2. Journalling in response to scripture helps us to be formed by God's word.
3. Meditation allows our imagination to help us to get in touch with God at all levels of our consciousness.
4. Dreams can be a special gift from God.
5. Our daily lives of receiving the daily news, TV, radio, papers, magazines, can be a basis for dialogue with God.
6. How God speaks to us through conversation.

All these can be ways of writing down the experiences that affect our soul in a particular way. My favourite is the use of questions. Where today did I specifically see or feel the presence of God working in my life and in the world? In what ways was I able to bring the spirit of Christ to the various parts of my life? How did I fail to show his loving spirit and compassion? Were there specific events this day that helped me understand who I am as a follower of Christ?

# Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

## Section 7

### The Bible

#### Thinking of reading the Bible

##### Reading the Bible....

- is essential for Christians to mature and deepen their relationship with God
- helps us to understand how God works amongst his people
- helps us to understand God's will for us and
- guides our own decision making and lifestyle choices.

In Deuteronomy 8:3 God taught the Israelites that they didn't live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Jesus referred to this truth when he responded to the temptation to turn stones into bread saying: "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)

Just as we need to eat to nourish our bodies and satisfy our physical hunger, so we need to read the Bible to sustain our spiritual well-being. Our physical bodies need food every day – and, to keep spiritually healthy, we need to read the Bible every day.

##### To help you to read the Bible every day .....

- ask God to help you to choose a reading plan or daily notes that are right for you at this time, and to help you to keep to your plan.
- It's usually helpful to have a regular time and place for reading the Bible and praying so that it becomes part of a daily routine – like cleaning your teeth!
- Each time you read, ask God to help you to understand what you read, and to speak to you as you read and pray.
- Consider keeping some notes as a reminder of verses or passages that have been especially relevant or helpful.

##### Resources to help with Bible reading

There are lots of resources to help with daily Bible reading – some are available in printed format, others are provided by email or online.

##### *Printed Format*

For each day, these give a Bible passage and some explanatory notes. Sometimes the focus is on a particular book, or part of a book in the Bible, and sometimes a theme is examined with readings taken from several books.

Notes for each day are provided in booklets that cover 3-4 months. They can be ordered on-line or purchased from a Christian bookshop.

Examples of organisations that produce these resources are:

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- Bible Reading Fellowship e.g. 'Guidelines' and 'New Daylight' [www.brf.org.uk](http://www.brf.org.uk)
- United Christian Broadcasting (UCB) 'Word for Today' [www.ucb.co.uk](http://www.ucb.co.uk)
- Scripture Union e.g. 'Encounter with God' and 'Daily Bread.' [www.scriptureunion.org.uk](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk)

#### ***Email and on-line***

There are many organisations that provide **free** on-line material and daily emails (if you sign up for them) that provide reflections on a verse or passage from the Bible. These are some examples:

- Freedom in Christ [www.ficm.org.uk/daily-devotional](http://www.ficm.org.uk/daily-devotional)
- Purpose Driven Life [www.purposedriven.com](http://www.purposedriven.com)
- 365Promises – daily email with verse, comment and photo - [www.365promises.com](http://www.365promises.com)
- UCB 'Word for Today' [www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today](http://www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today)
- Bible in a Year [www.ewordtoday.com/year/](http://www.ewordtoday.com/year/)

There are plans for reading the whole Bible in a Year – which usually involves reading about 3-4 chapters each day. The pattern of readings varies according to the type of plan. Choices include:

- Classic – on each day there is a reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament and from Psalms;
- Book Order – readings progress through the Bible in the order that the books are arranged, Genesis to Revelation;
- Chronological – readings follow the chronological order that events happened.

Resources can be printed for use with a hard copy Bible, or the readings for each day can be delivered to your phone or by email.

To see what's available, search on 'Bible in a Year'. Helpful resources include:

- Bible in One Year (email and smartphone app) gives daily readings and commentary from Nicky Gumbel [www.htb.org.uk/bioy/commentary/1](http://www.htb.org.uk/bioy/commentary/1)
- Wordlive from Scripture Union [www.wordlive.org/145176.id](http://www.wordlive.org/145176.id)

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### Making Sense of the Big Book

How to approach Bible reading

#### Why Bother?

Christianity is based on two assumptions:

- God wants a relationship with us
- God has revealed to us how that relationship can be established, nurtured and developed.

The primary way that God reveals himself to us is through the Bible. We read the Bible so that we may begin to know how God thinks.

Paul, the apostle, wrote very succinctly: “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and is useful one way or another – showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.”

*1 Timothy 3: 15-17*

#### So, how would you answer the “Why Bother” question from these verses?

#### What is the Bible?

The Bible is a library of 66 books split into 2 parts. About 40 authors were involved, and it was written over a period of several hundred years. The Old Testament relates events before the birth of Christ, the New Testament relates events after the birth of Christ.

The books of the bible are written in many different styles: these include narrative, history, poetry, prophecy, gospels, letters, apocalyptic. These books combine to tell a single story, God’s story of salvation.

#### So how do we go about reading it?

Here is one suggested method:

**Pray:** That God will speak as you read his word, helping you to understand it and respond to it.

**Read:** the Bible passage carefully.

**Think:** Explore the meaning of the passage:

- What is the main point?
- What does it teach about God?
- Is there a promise, warning, command, or example to take notice of?  
Are there any changes I need to make in my lifestyle.

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- How does the passage help us to understand ourselves, our situation or our relationships?
- Read any helps you have on the passage.
- If it helps, make a note of what you have found and what plan to do about it.

**Respond:** Use the passage and what you have found to help you worship God, and pray for others and yourself.

### Taking time out with God

There are two important activities in the process of getting to know God – reading the Bible and praying. The more regular we can be in spending time with God the better. And yet being alone with God can seem a daunting prospect. So what we're going to do in this session is to suggest a daily routine that isn't over-ambitious.

#### 10 Minutes with God

Here's a suggested way of dividing up the time each day. You will need a quietish place with as few distractions as possible, a Bible, notebook and a pencil.

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| ½ minute   | Pray  |
| 3 minutes  | Read the passage  |
| 4 minutes  | Think about the meaning of the passage. Make a note of anything you want to retain.   |
| 2½ minutes | Pray, applying the points you may have uncovered. Pray also for things on your heart or people you aim to pray for regularly. |

#### 10 minutes Total

If the times don't work out, it's not a problem. But by setting this sort of target, you might achieve it. If you aim to do an hour, you might never find that hour.

**It sometimes helps to agree with a friend that you are going to do this, then get together and share how you are getting on.**

#### Have a go at this

#### Two incidents where people heard God.

Use the "10 minutes with God" process and see what you come up with. Use the questions if they help you.

### Praying through Scripture

'One way to encounter God is to listen to the living word in the written word of God. Reading, meditating on and listening to the word of God's presence. We listen to a sentence, a story, or a

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parable not simply to be instructed, informed or inspired but to be formed into a truly obedient person of faith. Listening in this way we are guided by the Bible.”

*Henri Nouwen*

#### **Lectio Divina**

This method of prayer goes back to the early monastic tradition. There were not bibles for everyone and not everyone could read. So the monks gathered in the chapel to hear a member of the community reading from the scripture. They were taught and encouraged to listen with their hearts because it was the word of God they were hearing.

The method is very simple. You choose a passage perhaps from one of the gospels or epistles to start with, usually about 10 to 15 verses. (Of course, you can use passages from the Old Testament too!)

**Go to a quiet place and ask** God to speak to you through the passage.

**Read the passage aloud** to let yourself hear the words with your own ear. When you have finished reading, pause and recall if some word or phrase stood out for you. If so, pause and just reflect on this word or phrase for a moment noting any feelings or insight.

**Read the passage a second time** in the same way again noting any words or phrases that have commanded your attention. Reflect on their significance for you.

**Read the passage a third time** and focus again on a word/phrase that has jumped out for you. Stay with that word and ask if God is speaking something to you through it. What is this passage calling me to do? What gift does this passage lead me to ask of the Lord?

This kind of reflective listening allows the Holy Spirit to deepen our awareness of God taking the initiative to speak to us.

#### **Lectio Divina**

Literally meaning ‘divine’ or ‘spiritual reading’, this ancient way of **prayerful reading** of Scripture goes back to the Desert Fathers of fourth-century Egypt. They knew that the words of the Bible are not fully understood simply by reading or study. We also have to allow them to touch our hearts, leading us into communion with God. So they devised this simple form of listening to the word, to help us not only to know *about* God, but to know God through experience. This pattern has been followed in a variety of forms ever since. The Latin names for the different stages are included here, as a reminder of our heritage and rootedness in the vibrant faith and practice of Christians in the past.

**Reading (Lectio):** read the passage slowly and thoughtfully, perhaps twice. See if any word or phrase leaps out for you, or seems to be particularly apt for you today. Try not to analyse it – there will be a chance for that later.

**Meditation (Meditatio):** stay with those words and repeat them peacefully to yourself, letting them sink from your head into your heart. Continue to repeat the words for a while, either articulating them with your lips or just saying them in your mind. Allow the word or phrase to find its way to

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your inner being, 'as gently as a feather falling on a piece of cotton wool'. As you do this, let the significance of these words for you emerge naturally. Reflect on what God may be saying to you through this text.

**Verbal Response (Oratio):** talk to God in whatever way you want, in response to what has been offered to you.

**Contemplation (Contemplatio):** move into quiet communion with God, resting in his presence, and gently coming back to those key words whenever your mind wanders.

If nothing in particular seems to resonate with you in the passage it is worth waiting for a moment, as, sometimes, a word can suddenly strike you unexpectedly. Should that not happen, it is a good exercise to look again at the reading and see which people or situations in our present world you are reminded of. Spend the rest of the time in intercession for them.



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### Reading Plans (30 days for new Christians)

<b>Day</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Passage</b>
1	The fall of humanity	Genesis 3: 1-19
2	A people for God	Genesis 28: 10-15; 32: 22-28
3	10 Commandments	Exodus 20: 1-17
4	Sacrifices required under Law	Leviticus 5: 14-19
5	Punishments for Sin under Law	Leviticus 20: 7-27
6	Obedience from Love	Deuteronomy 11: 13-21
7	Cycles of Disobedience	Judges 2: 10-19
8	The People Demand a King	1 Samuel 8
9	Saul Fails and is Rejected	1 Samuel 15: 17-23
10	Many Kings Fail	Jeremiah 1-17
11	The Sin of the People	Ezekiel 20: 5-6
12	An Eternal King Promised	Jeremiah 23: 1-6; Isaiah 9: 6-7; Zechariah 9: 9-10
13	The Promised King is Born	Luke 2: 1-20
14	The Word became Flesh	John 1: 1-18
15	Signs and Miracles of Authority	Matthew 9: 1-8; Luke 13: 10-17
16	Jesus Fulfills the Law	Matthew 5: 17-20; Romans 8: 1-4
17	Jesus Teaches about New Life	John 3
18	Jesus Willingly Taken	John 18 1-11
19	Jesus' Death and Resurrection	Luke 23: 44-24:12
20	Christ a Sacrifice for All	Hebrews
21	God's Wrath Explained	Romans 1: 18-32
22	God's Judgment Explained	Romans 2: 5-11
23	Righteousness by Faith	Romans 3: 9-26
24	Life through Christ	Romans 5: 12-21
25	Life by the Spirit	Romans 8: 1-17; Galatians 5: 16-26
26	Living Sacrifices	Romans 12
27	Walking in the Light	1 John 1-2
28	Living for God	1 Peter 1-11
29	Love for One Another	1 John 3: 11-24
30	Promise of Eternity	2 Corinthians 5: 1-10; Revelation 21: 1-4

#### Using Spiritual Passages

1. Pause and feel the presence of God; Jesus next to you; the Holy Spirit breathing into you and onto you.
2. Make a prayer of offering: this time of reading and reflection is God's time.
3. Make a prayer of request: ask to listen, to be shown, to feel.
4. When you feel ready, open the bible and only read the passage set.
5. This is slow reading, granular reading, reading that gets into the cracks of words, like looking closely at a flower, a leaf, a sparrow's eye.
6. Don't worry about retrieving information from the passage or about what you know about the book or its history.

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7. Try to set aside your own church tradition's attitude to scripture; try to set aside your own assumptions.
8. Don't try and 'do' theology with the passage. Avoid asking 'bible study' style questions of the passage.
9. Don't be tempted to rush. Large print might help to slow you down.
10. Notice which words and images trigger thoughts and feelings in you.
11. If nothing seems to happen pray for insight and re-read the passage again even more slowly.
12. You might be using this passage for up to 2 weeks, sometimes longer, so let it seep into you slowly, like drizzling rain falling on dry land.
13. Spend the whole half an hour; don't snatch any of your gift to God back. A timing device with an alarm is useful, but perhaps not one that ticks (a silent clock radio or mobile phone might be better).
14. Feel free to move into silent, contemplative prayer. Just focus on God's loving presence.
15. At the end of half an hour make a prayer of thanksgiving for whatever and all you have experienced.
16. Take a 5 or 10 minute break with a tea, coffee, water or juice; take some fresh air.
17. Return to a different place and write a few notes in your journal. What insights have you received? What was God saying to you? Pray that the insights will continue through the day and that you will recall them.

These directions form up to an hour's session of prayer and reflection. They could be adapted if, for example, the time spent with scripture and on journaling afterwards were to be shorter.

'Each time you notice an inner reaction, pause to reflect on the words which inspired it, and talk with God about it, as with a very dear friend. Ask him what he wants to say to you personally *through* the words. Now the way in which God typically carries on a dialogue with us is to put a thought, by way of his answer, into our minds. It may look to us like our own thought, but if it arrives quickly, gently and easily, and brings us a sense of peace, calm or contentment, it is very likely from God. If, however, the thought which comes makes us feel disturbed, restless or irritable, that thought did not come from God!'

*Anita Woodwell, On Holy Ground (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008 p.26)*

'What matters is you "savour" and experience fully as much of the passage as you *do* read, and that you are aware of your own inner reactions, and converse with God about his message for you.'

*Woodwell p. 27*

'God *never wastes a minute of the time we give to him*. If nothing seems to be happening, it may well be that he is working at the level of your unconscious, preparing you to receive an experience or insight at a later time. So persevere!'

*Woodwell p.25*

'Someone absorbed in reading is a beautiful sight, as many great paintings attest. Observing, we become aware of a certain stillness of body and quietness of mind in the reader, a concentration of energies and a healing withdrawal from the anguish of life. It is a moment of ecstasy: a retreat from the direct involvement with one part of reality in order to be re-energized by contact with

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reality's less visible component/the act of reading symbolize something of what monastic life is all about: withdrawal from what is apparent to seek the reality that underlies appearances, in solitude, in silence, in recollection.'

*Michael Casey, Strangers to the City Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of St. Benedict (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2005) p. 44*

'It is much like reading poetry, and like poetry it gains from being said aloud, which allows the cadences and rhythm to emerge. All this will make demands and take time, sustained attention and concentration. It means being willing to carve out time that could have been spent on other things, recognizing its importance and giving it primacy by not allowing anything else into that sacred space. For unless I am silent and receptive I shall not be ready to open my heart, making myself vulnerable to God's word, which like a two-edged sword pierces through to the very bone and marrow.'

*Esther De Waal, Seeking Life: The Baptismal Invitation of the Rule of St. Benedict (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009) p. 67*

#### Praying the Scripture through Imagination

- Select a passage from one of the Gospels in which Jesus is interacting with others.
- Ask God to reveal new insights to you from the passage.
- Read the passage twice so that the story and the details of the story become familiar.
- Close your eyes and reconstruct the scene in your imagination. See what is going on and watch the people in the scene. What does Jesus look like? How do others react to him? What are the people saying to one another? What emotions fill their words? Is Jesus touching someone? Where do you fit into the scene? How do you feel about your role within the scene?
- Some people's imaginations are very active so they construct a movie-like scenario with the passage. Others will enter the scene with verbal imagination reflecting on the scene and mulling over the actions. Vividness is not a criteria for the effectiveness of this kind of prayer. Engagement is and the result is a greater interior knowledge of Jesus and yourself.
- As one finished this time of prayer, one should take a moment to speak person to person with Jesus saying what comes from the heart.

Reading often means gathering information acquiring new insight and knowledge. If we read the Bible just to acquire knowledge our reading does not help us in our spiritual lives. We need to trust that in the words that we read and reflect on, we can find the words that God wants to speak to us to help us to change and grow – words of encouragement, comfort, guidance, challenge and love.

*See 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 in The Message translation.*

'There's nothing like the written word of God for showing you the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Every part of scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another – showing us truth; exposing our rebellion correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped for the tasks God has for us.'

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A template you can use for Bible study

**BIBLE PASSAGE:**

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Begin by praying, asking God to speak through his word. Then read a short Bible passage aloud (10-15 verses is ideal). Instruct each person to go back over the passage on their own while being on the lookout for three things:



A light bulb: This should be something that ‘shines’ from the passage—whatever impacts most, or draws attention.



A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the passage or the Lord.



An arrow: A personal application for the reader’s life.

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I have also recently discovered an additional step that has reportedly led to the planting of thousands of churches in northern India. At the end of the Bible study, next to a speech bubble symbol, group members write down the name of a friend or relative who would benefit from them sharing what they learned from the study. Why not try it where you are?

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#### Still Waters

**Guidelines for Solitary Prayer** (*from Henri Nouwen, 2011 Spiritual Formation, pp 30 and 31*)

**First be silent.** Find a quiet place where you will be undisturbed for a while.

#### Focusing on the Word of God

In the daily discipline of prayer our focus is on God and the words of God. You can read a Psalm or a very short section of scripture. Simply take the passage and read it two or three times and keep your mind focused on that passage. Do not think about it in terms of analysing it, but simply become aware of what that passage presents to you. The text may show you Jesus healing someone or speaking with the disciples. That image of Jesus might become your focus. Or focus on a certain word or phrase that stands out for you in the passage. When you are distracted, just return to the image or the word you focused on *and reflect on why this image or word might be significant to you, what might God be saying to you through this word or image.* This is called **Lectio Divina**

Or after reading a passage of scripture take a bite, so to speak, out of the text. For instance take a very short sentence like 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' For ten minutes of meditation do nothing at all but say, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, The Lord is my Shepherd, The Lord is my Shepherd ..... ' Slowly this truth becomes part of us.

Repeating the phrase several times quiets us down and allows our mind to descend into our heart. The words quietly spoken become a hedge around a garden in which God's shepherding can be sensed. There we are with the Lord who becomes our loving shepherd who leads us to silent pastures where it is safe to dwell. This method is called **meditative prayer**.

**Prayer of the heart using the ancient 'Jesus Prayer'** - 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of David have mercy on me a sinner' from Luke 18:38. When these words are repeated daily they become part of our breathing, part of our heartbeat, part of our whole way of being. The beautiful thing about the Jesus Prayer is that we can take this practice with us in to our daily activities and prayer it when we are driving the car, sitting behind the desk etc. Saying these words throughout the day is one way of fulfilling the scriptural command to 'pray without ceasing'. (1Thessalonians 5: 17)

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#### **Spirituality in Daily Lives**

For centuries prayerful people have found direction for their daily lives by identifying with these moments.

For what am I most grateful?

For what am I least grateful?

God's will is generally for us to do more of whatever we are most grateful for and whatever gives us most life. Another way of framing the same reflection is:

When did I give and receive the most love today?

When did I give and receive the least love today?

Or

When did I feel most alive today?

When did I feel the least alive today?

Or

When was I happiest today?

When was I saddest today?

Or

What was today's high point?

What was today's low point?

It is a habit worth cultivating at the end of each day as a way of reflecting and remembering our experience of life and, as we prepare for sleep, a wonderful way of bathing our subconscious mind with the grace and gratitude of God.

Another dimension to this approach is that it helps each of us to appreciate all day long how the voice of God speaks to us in the everydayness of our lives. It is wisely said, "experience is the best teacher."

The scriptures are one way in which God reveals Himself, and life itself is another. It is precisely because God is present in life and available to human experience that our lives themselves are a divinely inspired story. I am more and more convinced that as we pay attention to our experience of God in the ordinariness of our lives, more and more we are able to recognise the face of God in all things.

#### **As you end each day**

1. Place your hand on your heart and ask Jesus to bring to your mind the moment today for which you are most grateful. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today? Ask yourself what was said or done in

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that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment.

2. Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are least grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love? Ask yourself what was said or done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.
3. Give thanks for whatever you have experienced. If possible share something of these moments, either by writing some reflections down in a journal, or with a trusted Christian friend.

Perhaps the greatest wisdom gift this spiritual practice can offer to us is that it can help us turn mistakes and wrong decisions into opportunities to learn and grow. As we listen more carefully, attentively and deeply to our lives we develop the art of listening well to both God and ourselves, and a more living awareness of the presence of God grows within us.



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### Rule of Life

Both the field and the pearl are metaphors for the kingdom of God – that state of being in which God is reigning in our life and his presence is shaping our reality. The kingdom of God is here now, if we are willing to arrange our life to embrace it. Paul speaks in passionate terms of using every ounce of his energy and intentionality to present every person mature in Christ. The question is – How bad do we want it?

Christian tradition has a name for the structure that enables us to say yes to the process of spiritual transformation day in and day out. It is called a rule of life. A rule of life seeks to respond to 2 questions:

Who do I want to be?

How do I want to live?

Actually it might be more accurate to say that a rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these 2 questions: How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?

St Benedict was the first one to develop a rule of life, to help monks who were living in communities to order their days very simply around 3 key elements of their life in God: pray, study and work. St Benedict's Rule, like any rule of life, is simply a pattern of attitudes, behaviours, and practices that are regular and routine and are intended to produce a certain quality of life and character.

An effective rule of life will be very personal. Your spiritual rhythm will take into account your personality, your spiritual type, your season of life, the sin patterns you are contending with, the places where you know God is trying to stretch you. Our rule needs to be realistic within our lifestyle and stage of life.

We need to be flexible and patient with ourselves as we seek to integrate our rule fully into the fabric of our lives. It is recommended to review it every 6 months with your spiritual director to evaluate how effective and life giving it is.

The process of beginning to cultivate our own rhythm of spiritual practices begins with attending to our desire, noticing what words, phrases and prayers seem to most consistently capture our sense of longing for God and for spiritual transformation. Am I willing to rearrange my life for what my heart most wants?

Then we take time to listen to our experiences with spiritual practices. We reflect on our experiences with various spiritual disciplines and invite God to show us which have been most life giving and have resulted in true life change. We observe also which disciplines were most stretching for us as well. Which spiritual practices and relationships have seemed to be most powerful in meeting the desires of the heart?

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The next step is to begin to develop a plan based on these reflections.

What am I beginning to understand about my minimum daily/weekly/monthly/yearly requirements for ongoing spiritual formation?

Which disciplines do I know I need to engage in regularly as a way of offering myself to God steadily and consistently? It is important to give thought to the disciplines practiced in solitude, disciplines related to life in our body and disciplines related to our life in the community.

We take into account the limits and opportunities of our life stage, our personality, our current circumstances, asking questions such as the following:

What practices will I seek to engage in on a daily basis? weekly? monthly? yearly?

Where will I engage in these disciplines?

What time of the day/week/month/year?

What have I learned about the significance of community for spiritual transformation through the journeying together e.g. spiritual director, small group, local church, other?

Are there other activities or practices that are particularly suited to my personality type? How will I incorporate these into the rhythm of my spiritual practices?

Are there certain practices particularly needed based on sins and negative patterns that I am aware of?

#### **Let's be practical:**

What schedule changes will I need to make in order to consistently choose these life giving disciplines?

What arrangements do I need to make with those I live with in order to make this possible?

After about 6 months, it's good to take some extended time with God to notice how it is going and whether some larger adjustments need to be made.

#### **Monitoring questions:**

Having a quiet heart that is not plagued by regret or frenzied living.

Having a burning heart that is focussed on pleasing God.

Having a dancing heart that serves others with joy and gladness nurturing the soul.

Having a daily time and space for Bible reading and prayer.

Having a weekly Sabbath time for worship and rest and praying through my rule of life.

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Being part and contributing to the Christian community in my local church.

Taking quarterly retreats for more extended reflection and re calibration of my rule of life.

Regularly meeting with my spiritual director to reflect on my life journey with God.

Ask: In what area(s) of my life right now am I most aware of my need for transformation?

Listen to your experiences with spiritual practices

Ask: Which spiritual practices and relationships seem to be most powerful in fulfilling the desires of my heart right now?

#### **Concrete activities to engage with God:**

- 1) Scripture
- 2) Supplication
- 3) Silence
- 4) Study
- 5) Service
- 6) Sharing
- 7) Stewardship.

How does it look and feel to you right now? Is it personal enough? Balanced? Realistic?

#### **Listening 'with the ear of your heart'**

What do you *actually* do to listen to God, to your own soul, to others:

Every day?

Every week?

Every month?

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Every year?

What would help you, as individuals and in your community, to become better listeners?

What does it mean for you to be obedient and accountable in your life?

Who are you accountable to for your use of your time, money, relationships, work/service, prayer life, leisure, how you look after yourself, how you live your life?

What might you change to become more accountable to God and to others?

#### **Stability**

What can you *choose* to do (or *not do*), long term, to put stability into your life and the lives of others?

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Into your close relationships/family?

Into your church and community life?

Into your work situation?

Who are the people who look to you for support?

Who do you look to for support?

What are the 'rocks' on which your life is built?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 7

How and where are you sustained and challenged?

### **Transformation**

What major changes have there been in your life in the past 5 years?

In what ways have you grown personally in that time?

Have other people noticed changes in you? What do they say about you?

What are you really *resisting* changing or accepting about yourself?

What one thing could you change now for the better?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 7

What will you *stop* doing in order to allow it to happen?

Would you be happy for others to use you as a model for how they should live?

What is your *BIG* vision?

What group of people might you work with to explore Rule of Life together?

## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church Section 7

### Getting the balance - Living by a Simple Rule

What do you actually do every day, week, month, year to sustain and grow ...	Every Day	Every Week	Every Month	Every Year
1. Your relationships with loved ones, family and close friends				
2. Your relationships in your church, community				
3. Your relationships with work colleagues, neighbours and wider community				
4. Your spiritual life/ relationship with God/your own soul				
5. Your own personal health and well-being				

What areas do you need to work on?

What *one thing* would you like to change in order to get a better balance?



## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

### Section 7

In one sentence, what is your personal Rule of Life?

Do you need to adapt or change it in any way?

#### **Reading:**

Finding Sanctuary, Christopher Jamison

Silence and Honey cakes, Rowan Williams

A Life Giving Way or Living with Contradiction, Esther de Waal

Living Well, Alan Hargrave, SPCK, 2010

The Rule of St Benedict



## Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church

### Section 8

#### Spiritual Direction

Simon Brown, a spiritual director, writes:

“The task of the spiritual director is to be positioned, like a campfire in the wilderness, welcoming sojourners from all corners of life to stop, relax and yarn for a while. A place where tired bodies and spirits are warmed by the fire and refreshed. A friendly atmosphere where stories of the road are shared amongst travellers. The job of the spiritual director is to keep the fire burning because we never know when a traveller will come to sit. It doesn’t matter where in the journey the traveller has been exploring, or how long they have been walking, if they come in peace to sit on a log by the campfire, they are welcome.”\*

Margaret Guenther believes that the spiritual director works like a midwife:

- staying beside the soul in labour;
- helping people recognise the sign is of God at work;
- watching for the shy indications of conception, pregnancy, movement and growth;
- being alert for those factors, which might harm or hinder the birthing process; and
- helping celebrate new life even if it emerges from the death of expectations or previously cherished images of God.

Father Reginald Ward reminds us that:

“The task of spiritual director is not that they should be a judge or dictator issuing commands, but that they should be a physician of the soul whose main work is to diagnose the ills of the soul and the hindrances to its contact with God; and to find, as far as they are given grace, a cure for them.”

Kenneth Leech suggests the following:

“The first essential quality of the spiritual guide is holiness of life, closeness to God. Second, the spiritual director is a person of experience, someone who has struggled with the realities of prayer and life. Third, the spiritual director is a person of learning. Fourth, the spiritual director is a person of discernment, perception and insight. Fifth, a spiritual director gives way to the Holy Spirit.”

If you want to find a spiritual director ask friends, your local vicar or contact your local diocese or get in touch with National Retreat Association, email: [info@retreats.org.uk](mailto:info@retreats.org.uk)

“Soul Friend” Kenneth Leech

\*“Mission and the Art of Spiritual Direction” Simon Brown



## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church**

### **Section 9**

#### **The Daily Office**

The Daily Office normally takes place at least twice a day. It is about being with God: about communion with Him. The goal of the Daily Office is to pay attention to God throughout the entire day. The word Office comes from the Latin word 'opus' or 'work'. For the early church, the Daily Office was always the work of God. Nothing was to interfere with that priority.

About 525AD, Benedict structured his life of prayer around the Daily Office and since then it has been a fundamental resource for many Christians as a way of stopping to be with God. Its great power is in setting apart small units of time for morning, mid-day and evening prayer, which infuses the rest of our daily activities with a deep sense of the sacred: of God. The Daily Office, when practised consistently, works to eliminate the division of the sacred and the secular in our lives.

Our pausing to be with God can last anywhere from 2 to 20 minutes and can provide for us a flexible, balanced, daily framework to guide us. It can be a way of letting go of the tensions, distractions and pressures of daily life and to find space to rest in the love of God.

The core ingredients include prayer, scripture, silence and the regular saying of the Psalms. It is an ancient spiritual discipline that can breathe new life into our busy Christian lives. It helps us to pay attention to the Christian seasons and festivals and the ancient wisdom of the saints of the Christian tradition.

Examples:

Common Worship: Church House Publishing

The Rhythm of Life Celtic Daily Prayer: David Adam

Celtic Daily Prayer: The Northumbria Community



## **Spiritual Formation in the Mission-Shaped Church**

### **Section 10**

#### **Conclusion**

A great deal has been said and written in recent years about the health, hope and future of the church in our land. It is my conviction that a core ingredient in the nature and character of Christianity in the coming years is the quality of our work in spiritual formation.

Basically, in our consumerist, work-driven, volatile world how do we form stable, healthy Christians who know God deeply, themselves deeply and love others deeply. I believe it will happen as more Christian people take responsibility for nurturing their intellectual, emotional and spiritual hinterlands well.

As Christians learn to feed their minds, hearts and souls well and live Christ-centred lives that have good pace, purpose, depth and direction to them, I am convinced, if these things happen, as the parable of the sower predicts, more 100-fold Christians with fire in their bellies and Christ-like character will emerge across the four corners of our country. People who know God, know themselves and know their calling will change the world around them from being self-centred to Christ-centred.

Revd. Keith Mobberley