



# Spiritual Discernment

SOUL CARE RETREAT GUIDE

Half-day | Individual

Spiritual discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit. In discernment we turn our attention to the ongoing presence of God in our midst. Discernment is the process of prayerfully sifting through the many voices that vie for our daily attention, and invite us instead to listen carefully to the gentle whispers of God. As one writer summarizes, discernment is the means by which we recognize and acknowledge what God is doing and what God desires; see a situation from God's perspective; listen to the Holy Spirit who prays within and among us; and hear and obey God's voice. The goal is to recognize when "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15: 28).

Is discernment only useful or needed when we're at a significant crossroads? Is it possible that discernment could be an integral part of our daily spiritual life? I believe it can be. In the everyday circumstances and relationships of life, discernment is learning to "pay attention" and see how God is at work among and within us. How often throughout your day are you aware of God's movement and voice? Are you aware of what's going on inside of you as well as the more obvious goings on around you? Like many aspects of the spiritual life, discernment is hard to do on the run. We need to pause, quiet ourselves, and pay attention. That's the purpose of this retreat guide.

May you discover afresh the awesome love of the Lord for YOU as you enter into a retreat that will nurture your soul and cultivate your heart for God. LTI is here for you every step of the way!

*"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."* (1 Samuel 3:9)



Stephen Macchia  
Founder and President  
Leadership Transformations, Inc.

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# SUGGESTIONS AS YOU PREPARE FOR YOUR RETREAT

## Where should the retreat be held?

Place matters when planning your retreat. Choose a location that is not noisy or busy or cluttered, and that has a wide open feel, not crowded or designed as classroom space. Ask pastors or ministry leaders for ideas or search online for “retreat centers” in your area. These places often charge a nominal fee for a day’s usage.

## When is the ideal time?

We’ve provided an afternoon schedule so that you can “leave it all behind” as you go on retreat rather than anticipating the workload as you wrap up. Feel free to modify this if morning is better for you. Choose a day that will be conducive to entering an unrushed, spacious time.

## What will I need?

### What to bring:

- Bible
- Journal & pen
- Comfortable shoes
- Sunscreen, sunglasses, blanket (seasonal)
- Gloves, boots, coat (seasonal)
- Sketchbook & drawing materials

### What not to bring:

- Laptop
- Cell phone/PDA
- MP3 players
- Recreational reading
- Anything that will distract you

*“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (I John 3:1)*

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## RESOURCES INCLUDED WITH THIS GUIDE

### Theme Specific—Spiritual Discernment

- A Guide to Worship and Prayer  
“Spiritual Discernment”
- Contemplative Bible Reading
- Touch Point  
“Spiritual Discernment”

### General Soul Care Retreat Touch Points

- “Retreats for Companionship with God”
- “Silence and Solitude”
- “Intimacy with Christ”
- “Reflective Journaling”
- “Contemplative Bible Reading”

## AS YOU BEGIN, CONSIDER THIS SIMPLE YET PROFOUND INVITATION ...

**Cease** The hardest part of building your retreat is making the choice to stop your daily activities in order to make space ... uncluttered, unhindered space ... to be alone and quiet, fully attentive to receive from God. Sabbath rest is designed by God so that we would regularly STOP our harried lives and be still in God's presence in order to reflect deeply on the gift of life given to us. Are you willing to step away from your busy life in order to embrace that which will give you life in all its fullness? (See the Touch Point on "Retreats for Companionship with God.")

**Rest** Give yourself permission to rest. When Jesus invited his followers to retreat from the world and come away with him to pray, his disciples rested deeply in his presence. It's OK to take a nap—resting is an essential element of preparing to hear the voice of the One who loves you with intimate affection. Jesus often withdrew to a quiet place and rested in his Father's presence. Retreats are designed to be restful experiences for the people of God. (See the Touch Point on "Sabbath Rest.")

**Refresh** Spiritual refreshment is one of the intentional outcomes of retreat. When your soul is refreshed it's filled up with God. This refreshment comes to us in many ways: through the Word, the beauty of creation, silence and solitude, large blocks of time to pray, enjoying a meal, journal writing, drawing a picture, or simply kneeling before the Lord and receiving from him. Come with a sense of anticipation that God will not disappoint you as you draw near to him. Simply enter your retreat with open, outstretched hands of love and gratitude. He is waiting to fill your soul with the bread of life!

**Renew** As you move through your retreat time, make note of places where you sense God's invitation to a deeper walk with him. Biblically and historically, renewal for the people of God has happened when we incline our ears in his direction and grow more intimate in our fellowship with the Father. This comes about when we are fervent in our prayers, diligent in our study of his Word, and transparent in our need for grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. Renewal occurs when we reflect on the ways God is inviting us to hop off the treadmill of activity, turn off the constant noise around us, and become attentive to his daily beckoning to draw near and follow him. Retreats are set-apart times to choose renewal—to make counter-intuitive, counter-cultural decisions to be transformed from the inside out. (See the Touch Point on "Reflective Journaling.")

**Read** When we get away for a soul care retreat the only resources we should bring along are our Bible, journal and pen. Any additional reading may only clutter the mind and keep the soul from digging deeply into bite-sized portions of the Word of God. Read slowly and carefully what's before you ... believing firmly that "less is more" when reading the Bible on retreat. The ancient practice of lectio divina, or sacred reading, is a wonderful way to soak up the richness of the Word. With the Bible, the longer you sit

and linger in a short passage, the more you will get out of this simple reading. (See the Touch Point on "Contemplative Bible Reading.")

**Feast** Soul Care Retreats are not designed to be somber occasions—instead they are delightful times to find joy in your walk with the Lord! If you are alone you can celebrate the blessing of time with God in wonderful fellowship. If you are with a group you should have a healthy rhythm of silence, alone time and time together with others. It's amazing to discover that indeed community can be built mysteriously through shared silence! (Try it!) In the together times you may choose to be silent, but there is also room for laughter and joyful sharing about God's work among us. This may come during small group sharing, meal times, prayer walks, or even in the form of a party to give praise together for the ways God is bringing us closer to himself and to our faith community. Don't shun the celebration of retreat!

**Embrace** Throughout your retreat it is important to embrace the life that God is inviting you to experience. At the beginning of the retreat, it may simply be a recommitment to your life in Christ. As the retreat continues to unfold, you will discover yourself embracing the delight of fellowship with God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As you experience the richness of his presence you may in fact find yourself talking more intimately with your Father. This invitation may include specifics about vocation, relationships, personal disciplines, or spiritual vitality. We call this a "rule of life" and our holistic understanding of the rule includes the development of our soul, the health of our relationships, the care for our body, the stewardship of our resources, and the fulfillment of our call/mission. It's important on retreat to embrace the life you have today and the renewed life God has in store for you in the future.

*"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (John 15:4)*

We pray this retreat will be an enriching time for you and/or your team. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance and encouragement along the way. Keep an eye on our online store for a growing list of retreat resources like this one: half day, full day, overnight, etc.

For your depth of soul and vitality in service,  
The LTI Team

## SCHEDULE

### Arrival time

Plan to arrive at your retreat location with at least 30 minutes to get settled and feel comfortable in your surroundings.

### 12:00 noon

Plan for a slow, leisurely, nutritious lunch ... don't eat too much heavy food since that will add to a sluggish-like afternoon. It's fine to take a nap but not because you've eaten too much!

### 1:00 pm

Opening session designed for entering into the experience prayerfully and reflectively. Use the enclosed worship outline to guide you. Also use the Touch Point on "Contemplative Bible Reading" to help you approach the short passage you will be focusing on for this retreat. Read the Touch Point on "Silence and Solitude" to set the tone for your afternoon.

### 2:00 pm

Alone time to soak in the Word of God using the "Lectio Divina" method (again, see the Touch Point on "Contemplative Bible Reading"). Invite the Lord to speak into your soul through the prayerful receiving of his Word. Don't rush through this—make it a spacious encounter with the Living God and journal your reflections on how you sense the Lord inviting you into deep rest and renewal. (See the Touch Point on "Reflective Journaling.")

### 3:00 pm

After a full hour of biblical reflection and journaling, take a walk or a nap or find a creative outlet to add balance and joy to your afternoon retreat.

### 4:00 pm

The final hour of this retreat should be for further reflection and prayer around the insights gleaned or the refreshment of soul received earlier. Spend time writing in your journal or in prayerful meditation.

### 5:00 pm

End your afternoon in a spirit of gratitude and praise to the Lord. Ask for his blessing on the time you spend deepening your intimacy with him. Plan now for the next time you will carve a half day or day out of your busy schedule for retreat.

Drive home slowly and carefully—without your cell phone or other technology that will all too soon steal away the joy of your time on retreat!

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## GOING DEEPER THROUGH OTHER RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

We highly recommend the following before or after (but not during!) your retreat time:

- Leighton Ford's *The Attentive Life: Discerning God's Presence in All Things* to help you pay attention to God's work in you and around you.
- Pierre Wolff's *Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well, Revised Edition* based on the time-tested spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.
- Gordon T. Smith's *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer and the Witness of the Spirit* for learning to hear and heed the voice of Jesus in everyday life.
- Valerie K. Isenhower and Judith A. Todd's *Living into the Answers: A Workbook for Personal Spiritual Discernment* which will guide you through a process of listening and choosing based on the understanding that God is to be at the center of decision making.

Bookmark [www.SpiritualFormationStore.com](http://www.SpiritualFormationStore.com) where these books and hundreds of other titles are categorized into spiritual formation topics. You'll also find downloadable resources and additional retreat guides like this one to aid you in the care of your soul.

# A GUIDE TO

# Worship & Prayer



## SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

### SILENT REFLECTION

### OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and most merciful Father, you have made yourself known to the people of God throughout all ages, and you've proven yourself faithful to us in times past. Today we long to be in your presence, abiding in your love, and becoming people who fulfill the purposes you have for us. Refresh us with your Spirit, inspire us with the example of your Son, and renew our walk with you. For we long to know your will, as we seek your guidance and peace. In the strong name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

### HYMN: Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah (*William Williams, 1745*)

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but you are mighty;  
hold me with your powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore (2x).

Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be Thou still my Strength and Shield (2x).

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to Thee (2x).

### SCRIPTURE READING

#### Psalm 63: 1-8

- 1 You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.
- 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.
- 3 Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.
- 4 I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- 5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
- 6 On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.
- 7 Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
- 8 I cling to you;  
your right hand upholds me.

## REFLECTIVE READING

“I used to believe that everyone mumbled. My family, my friends, telephone callers, even radio personalities seemed to have lost the ability to speak clearly. Then I was fitted with hearing aids. What a surprise! Everyone spoke with clarity. What had changed? I had accepted help in hearing. Trying to listen and hear clearly the voice of God is not an easy task nor a casual undertaking. We all need help to hear clearly and completely the truth of God for our lives and our world. The Christian community is one of those helps or aids to our hearing clearly the voice and direction of God. The events of the world around us, the events of our lives, the natural world, the Scriptures, prayer, worship, sacred reading, a spiritual guide or friend, all can help us to hear.”

### - Rueben Job

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (Colossians 1: 9-12).

## REFLECTIONS

In one phrase or sentence, speak out that which you are seeking in this time of prayer, reflection, and discernment ...

## PRAYERFUL RESPONSE

Grant us O Lord, to know what we ought to know, to love what we ought to love, to praise what delights you most, to value what is precious in your sight, to hate what is offensive to you. Do not allow us to judge according to the sight of our eyes, nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of our ears; but to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual, and above all things, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of your will ...

### - Thomas `a Kempis

## HYMN: Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us (*Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1836*)

Savior like a shepherd lead us, much we need Thy tender care  
In thy pleasant pastures feed us, for our use Thy folds prepare  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, Thou hast bought us, thine we are (2x)

We are thine, do thou befriend us, be the guardian of our way  
Keep thy flock from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, hear O hear us when we pray (2x)

Early let us seek Thy favor, early let us do Thy will  
Blessed Lord and only Savior, with Thy love our beings fill  
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, Thou hast loved us, love us still (2x)

## CLOSING PRAYER

Loving Creator, we place our lives into your hands with confidence in your love and fidelity. We know that you will lead us into your will and so we ask in confidence, do with us what you will and lead us this day in truth and righteousness. We offer our prayers and our lives in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## WORKS CITED

“I used to believe...”

Job, Rueben P. *A Guide to Spiritual Discernment*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1996, pg. 24-25.

# Contemplative BIBLE READING



Created by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

- Before you begin, quiet yourself by sitting in silence. Pray that God would speak to you through his word.
- Read through the passage below 3-4 times, either out loud or silently. Read it slowly. Pause and rest on a word or phrase that jumps out at you. Reflect on what God is saying to you.
- Spend some time in prayer, How is God leading you? Give thanks, ask for forgiveness, pray for guidance, rest in God's love.
- Move into contemplative stillness. Simply rest in God's presence. Stay open to God and listen to him. How is God revealing himself to you? (Adapted from *Contemplative Bible Reading* by Richard Peace, NavPress, 1998).

## Luke 24:13-35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.







# Touch Point

## SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

“Discernment for the Christian community begins with the individual Christian. Do I want to know God’s will more than anything else? This question is the entryway into discernment. And it can be answered with affirmation only by those who love God and have learned to trust God. If we have any higher priority in our search for God’s guidance, we will not be able to trust our discernment. I must spend enough time in prayer and faithful listening to the voice of God to be brought to that moment of trust and surrender when I can give up my preconceived ideas and become open to God’s idea...Can Christians know God’s will? Can the Church know God’s will? Can our congregation know God’s will? Nearly two thousand years of experience shout a resounding yes!”

- **Rueben P. Job**

“Spiritual discernment asks us to pay attention. We need to attend to both what goes on around us and within us. Ideally, this attentiveness goes on much of the time, a sort of low level, constant spiritual shifting of the data of our experience. But there are times when discernment becomes much more focused, when a crossroad is reached or a choice called for. At times like these the cumulative wisdom of tradition tells us to pay attention on many levels: to consult scripture, to seek the advice of trusted advisors, to heed the collective sense of the faithful, to read widely and deeply the best ancient and contemporary thinking, to pray, to attend to the prick of conscience and to the yearnings and dreamings of our hearts, to watch, to wait, to listen.”

- **Wendy W. Wright**

“As we go through our days...the key is always the same: openness and receptivity. The ideal is that we would approach our day with a childlike eagerness to listen and learn, to hear and consider, open to surprises....Most of all, we are reminded to listen, only attend to the Holy Spirit when we come with open hearts and open hands before the truth; this is the posture of life-giving humility, the disposition that enables us to truly engage the Spirit of the Living God.”

- **Gordon T. Smith**

“In the luminous story of the walk to Emmaus the risen Jesus joins two of his friends on the road. They do not recognize him at first but share their grief over the suffering and death of Jesus, which had disappointed their hopes that he would redeem Israel. As they walk, he talks with them, opening new depths and understanding of the Scriptures, bringing meaning to the suffering. They invite him to the inn; he sits with them at table, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread. In that act they know him. But when he leaves their sight, they wonder together why they had not recognized him earlier. ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?’ The two friends return to Jerusalem and share their experience with the other disciples. The presence of Jesus stands among them again. As we study closely the account, we see clearly delineated the nature of the fire that burned in their hearts. Peace was spoken in their midst. Authentic clarity was given. Redemptive meaning was given to pain. Fear was healed, and joy was released and increased. Jesus was shown to them as one who shares the full human condition and who is resurrected in the midst of his humanity, and theirs. Empowerment from God was promised rather than demands for their will power. Above all, the whole encounter was drenched with the spirit of tenderness, the burning love which is released from fear. And this is the supreme sign, the authentic unmistakable presence of the Spirit we call Holy.”

- **Flora S. Wuellner**

“...attentiveness is both a gift to treasure and a discipline to practice. The attentive eye and ear come from ‘the attentive heart...a new heart, a simple heart, a pure heart...a heart given by God.’ ...The gift must be nurtured through the spiritual discipline of discernment, a continual kind of ‘eye washing’ in which we welcome the things that bring transparency and avoid those things that dull our vision. ‘Discernment...is needed so that the attentive heart can be about its one purpose: to lead the disciple to live so as to begin to know, even now, a foretaste of what the human heart has not yet conceived.’”

- **Leighton Ford**

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“In the luminous story...”

Job, Rueben P. *A Guide to Spiritual Discernment*. Here Job is quoting Flora S. Wuellner., pg. 73-74.

“Attentiveness is both a gift...”

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# Appendix

## GENERAL SOUL CARE RETREAT TOUCH POINTS

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Retreats on Companioning with God

Silence and Solitude

Intimacy with Christ

Reflective Journaling

Contemplative Bible Reading





# Touch Point

## RETREATS FOR COMPANIONING WITH GOD

Compiled by Susan P. Currie, D.Min.

### Retreat as Set-Aside Time and Space

- Set aside time: Take off your watch. Silence your cell phone.
- Set aside space: Find a quiet room, corner, or place undistracted by others' activity.
- Set aside your agenda: no to-do lists, sermon/lesson plans, homework, letters. You're here not to master something, but to be mastered by God.

"It takes time to develop a life of prayer: set-aside, disciplined, deliberate time. It isn't accomplished on the run. I know I can't be busy and pray at the same time. I can be active and pray; but I cannot be busy and pray. I cannot be inwardly rushed, distracted, or dispersed. In order to pray I have to be paying more attention to God than to what people are saying to me, to God than to my clamoring ego. Usually, for that to happen there must be a deliberate withdrawal from the noise of the day, a disciplined detachment from the insatiable self."

- Eugene Peterson

### Retreat as Attentive Listening to and with God

- Frame your day with Scripture, just a verse or paragraph, inviting you into God's presence. Come back to this through the day, to remind you of God's ongoing invitation for your attention. Depart with this verse sending you out.
- If you are in a communal setting, you may share the communal practices of opening and closing prayer, occasional corporate worship, and silent meals as ways of supporting each other in shared presence to God. You may meet with another person for intentional spiritual direction/companionship, to process what's going on in your attention to God.
- You may rest or sleep, as part of your trusting resting in God. Practice this as an intentional act of trust, committing yourself, body and soul, to God's care, and awakening, refreshed and more attentive, with thanksgiving for his continuing presence.
- Slow down: Notice whatever God's Holy Spirit in you draws your attention to, in his word, in your thoughts, in your heart, in the natural world around you. Converse with God about what you notice. Listen. Journal what goes on.

"Our conditioning as members of a consumer society prevents us from abandoning hope that, with sufficient planning, we might yet be able to see and do everything. To move slowly and deliberately through the world, attending to one thing at a time, strikes us as radically subversive, even un-American. We cringe from the idea of relinquishing, in any moment, all but one of the infinite possibilities offered us by our culture. Plagued by a highly diffused attention, we give ourselves to everything lightly. That is our poverty. In saying yes to everything, we attend to nothing. One only can love what one stops to observe. 'Nothing is more essential to prayer,' says Evagrius, 'than attentiveness.'"

- Belden C. Lane

### Retreat as the Place of God's Transforming Work

In this set-aside, attentive place, you'll begin to notice your false and true self, and God's gracious, loving work in you.

**False Self:** Notice your false self tendencies. Confess what comes up.

**True Self:** Notice how God is loving you right now, based on simply being with him. In this place of being held in God's loving embrace, what desires, joys, longings does God's Holy Spirit in you stir up? What fears are present, and what invitations to trust? Reflect with God, on his invitations/calling to you.

"In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me—naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived, broken—nothing...that is the struggle. It is the struggle to die to the false self. But...the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ. ...Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. As we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that he is our true self, we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God..."

- Henri Nouwen

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# Touch Point

## SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

“What does the voice of God sound like? The voice from heaven reported in Matthew 17: 1-8 suggests that when we listen to Jesus, we hear the voice of God. The voice the disciples heard was understandable and it directed them to listen to Jesus, the beloved son. It is not that difficult to read the words of Jesus. To listen to and obey those words is more demanding. As Christians we share the good news that God can be heard, understood, and obeyed. We have Scriptures, nature, history, and the stories of our lives that speak God’s truth. Further we have the capacity to ‘hear’ God’s voice deep within our own souls. Through the centuries faithful listeners have discovered ways to sharpen their listening skills. Practices and disciplines increase our desire and capacity to be faithful to what we hear and know to be the voice of God. John Wesley called these practices means of grace, that is, practices that mediate God’s love, will, presence, and power in very special ways. Do you want to hear God speak to you? Polish up your practices of prayer, worship, witness, and service, and you will be amazed at what you hear.”

- **Reuben Job**

“The Word of God is not a word to apply in our daily lives at some later date; it is a word to heal us through, and in, our listening here and now. The questions therefore are: How does God come to me as I listen to the Word? Where do I discern the healing hand of God touching me through the Word? How are my sadness, my grief, and my mourning being transformed at this very moment? Do I sense the fire of God’s love purifying my heart and giving me new life? These questions lead me to the sacrament of the Word, the sacred place of God’s real presence.”

- **Henri Nouwen**

“There are few things that help so much for conversing with Christ as silence. The silence I speak of is, obviously, the inner silence of the heart without which the voice of Christ will simply not be heard. This inner silence is very hard to achieve for most of us: close your eyes for a moment and observe what is going on within you. The chances are you will be submerged in a sea of thoughts that you are powerless to stop—talk, talk, talk (for that is what thinking generally is, me talking to myself)—noise, noise, noise: my own inner voice competing with the remembered voices and images of others, all clamoring for my attention. What chance does the subtle voice of God stand in all this din and bustle?... Your tolerance of silence is a fairly good indicator of your spiritual (and even intellectual and emotional) depth.”

- **Anthony de Mello**

“Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and him alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching, and guiding—we need to set aside a time and space to give him our undivided attention. Jesus says, ‘Go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place’ (Matthew 6:6).”

- **Henri Nouwen**

“Attentiveness to God’s spirit requires deeply receptive, prayerful listening. Practicing the art of attending to the Spirit involves us in contemplative listening. Such listening is quite distinct from the various ways in which we generally listen to another...it is holy listening, rooted in silence. It seeks emptiness in order to be filled with the Spirit. It is permeated by humility. Such listening assumes that the Spirit is active among us and works through us. It is primarily receptive, patient, watchful, and waiting. Yet it does not fear action when action is called for.”

- **Wendy Wright**

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# Touch Point

## INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

“Discipleship cannot be realized without discipline. Discipline in the spiritual life, however, has nothing to do with the discipline of athletics, academic study, or job training, in which physical fitness is achieved, new knowledge is acquired, or a new skill is mastered. The discipline of the Christian disciple is not to master anything, but rather to be mastered by the Spirit. True Christian discipline is the human effort to create the space in which the Spirit of Christ can transform us into his image. For most of us it is very hard to spend a useless hour with God. It is hard precisely because by facing God alone we also face our own inner chaos. We come in direct confrontation with our restlessness, anxieties, resentments, unresolved tensions, hidden animosities, and longstanding frustrations. Our spontaneous reaction to all this is to run away and get busy again, so that we at least can make ourselves believe that things are not as bad as they seem in our solitude.”

- **Henri Nouwen**

“It was love that drew John into a deeper intimacy with Jesus than the other apostles. Jesus loved them all, but John alone appropriated the title ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ If Jesus loved John more, it was because John loved Him more. Mutual love and confidence are the keys to intimacy. It would seem that admission to the inner circle of deepening intimacy with God is the outcome of deep desire. Only those who count such intimacy a prize worth sacrificing anything else for, are likely to attain it. If other intimacies are more desirable to us, we will not gain entry to that circle. The place on Jesus’ breast is still vacant, and open to any who are willing to pay the price of deepening intimacy. We are now, and we will be in the future, only as intimate with God as we really choose to be.”

- **J. Oswald Sanders**

“The psalmist seems to speak of his sweetest comforts, as those which he has in secret: ‘My soul shall be satisfied, as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches’ (Ps. 63:5-6). ...The most eminent divine favours which the saints obtained, that we read of in Scripture, were in their retirement. ...God revealed himself to Moses in the bush, when he was in a solitary place in the desert, in Mount Horeb (Exod. 3). And afterwards, when God showed him his glory, and he was admitted to the highest degree of communion with God that ever he enjoyed; he was alone, in the same mountain, and continued there forty days and forty nights, and then came down with his face shining. ...And when Jesus Christ had his greatest prelibation of his future glory, when he was transfigured; it was not when he was with the multitude or with the twelve disciples, but retired into a solitary place in a mountain, with only three select disciples, whom he charged that they should tell no man, until he was risen from the dead. When the angel Gabriel came to the blessed virgin, and when the Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, she seems to have been alone, in this matter hid from the world...And she that first partook of the joy of Christ’s resurrection, was alone with Christ at the sepulchre (John 20). And when the beloved disciple was favoured with those wonderful visions of Christ, and his future dispensations towards the church and the world, he was alone in the isle of Patmos.”

- **Jonathan Edwards**

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# Touch Point

## REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

“The mystics of old were known by the adage, ‘action without reflection is meaningless action.’ I have thought long and hard about this simple phrase, and the profundity of it amazes me. Truly, if we go through our days without sensing the need to reflect on what we’ve observed, experienced, felt, or heard, we miss the rich meaning of our daily walk. There is so much to say about what we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell about life—and the discipline of reflection exposes all of this in a healthy, life-giving way.

The Puritans called this ‘preview and review.’ The practice of preview is an encouragement to begin our day with our Bible, journal, and calendar, focusing on the day ahead, inviting Jesus to walk with us in our day, and surrendering to the plans of the Lord in the hours to follow. The practice of review encourages disciples to spend an equal amount of time at the end of the day, noting the highlights and disappointments of the day, and praying over situations or relationships that need follow-up prayer or action.

In the practice and exercise of the discipline of reflection—through previewing and reviewing our days—we learn the significance of our silence before God and the end result of submission to his love and lordship. As we learn to recognize God’s work in our days, we begin to see with greater clarity how his grace, power, presence, and blessing are woven throughout each new day. God is at work in every relationship and every experience we have as we abide in Christ.

Preview and review teaches the disciple to anticipate with God the many ways he delights to show himself to us as his children. As we keep our eyes and ears open to his work in our midst, we celebrate his divine intervention in others’ lives as well as in our own.”

- Stephen A. Macchia

A few practical suggestions for utilizing a journal in your discipline of reflection:

- **Privacy** – your journal is for written communication between you and God; write in your journal as if no one else will ever read your words
- **Honesty** – your journal is for honest, transparent confession of sin, joy, and need; in past, present and future experiences—use it with integrity
- **Variety** – your journal is for prayers, reflections, poetry, drawings, and any other creative ways you wish to express your love to God
- **Ordinary** – your journal is for use in very ordinary days where God shows up and reveals the extraordinary ways he has blessed
- **Daily** – your journal is for ongoing communion with God; preferably on a daily basis, even if you only record the date and one line of text

May God richly bless your desire to go deeper in your life of prayer, contemplative Bible reading, and reflective journaling. Be patient in the process of stripping away old habits and acquiring new ones. God’s love will be revealed in renewing ways as you pursue your daily disciplines as a disciple of Jesus Christ in earnest pursuit of holy living in a needy world. Out of the depth of your soul, may you discover vitality in your service to Christ and His Church.

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# Touch Point

## CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE READING

Compiled by Stephen A. Macchia, D.Min.

“The Bible stands at the center of all traditions of Christian spirituality. The question is not whether one should study the Bible. The question is how to study the Bible so that it transforms us. This is where approaches vary. Contemplative Bible reading is one such approach that can help us access Scripture in a life-changing way. It is one of the oldest methods of Bible study. Its traditional name is *lectio divina*, a Latin phrase (pronounced lex-ee-oh divee-nuh) that can be translated ‘divine reading’ or ‘spiritual reading’ or ‘sacred reading.’ *Lectio* has been used for over 1,500 years. It is gaining popularity as more and more people are finding it a powerful way to nurture their spiritual lives. In the past (especially in the Protestant church), we have concentrated on the study of the Bible. As a result we have come to know a lot about the Bible. But we have not been very good at applying the Bible. *Lectio divina* is an approach that builds on serious Bible study but moves to new depths as we open ourselves to God through the Bible.”

- Richard Peace

There are a number of approaches to reading the Bible contemplatively. First, we’ll look at the four “movements” or “processes” involved. These four “movements” are:

- **Reading/Listening:** Read aloud a short passage of Scripture. As you read, listen for the word or phrase that speaks to you. What is the Spirit drawing attention to?
- **Meditating:** Repeat aloud the word or phrase to which you are drawn. Make connections between it and your life. What is God saying to you by means of this word or phrase?
- **Praying:** Now take these thoughts and offer them back to God in prayer, giving thanks, asking for guidance, asking for forgiveness, and resting in God’s love. What is God leading you to pray?
- **Contemplating:** Move from the activity of prayer to the stillness of contemplation. Simply rest in God’s presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing himself to you?”

- Richard Peace

## The Process of Contemplative Bible Reading

Next, it is useful to explore more of the step-by-step instructions for the process of contemplative Bible reading. *Lectio Divina* can be broken down into six parts: *silencio*, *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*, and *incarnatio*.

“*Silencio* is a period of silence before reading the passage. It is a time of letting go of your personal agenda and surrendering to whatever God wants you to experience as you read. *Lectio* is the reading and receiving of the Word of God. It is usually good to read the passage or verse at least once aloud and then once slowly, silently. *Meditatio* is the time of thinking about what the passage says. *Oratio* is responding to the passage by telling God about the feelings you had as you read and thought about the passage. (In *meditatio* we think with our minds, and in *oratio* we notice our feelings. Both our hearts and our minds are avenues for God’s Spirit to come to us.) Then we move to *contemplatio* when we listen to God, waiting expectantly for the Spirit to whisper to our spirit. This may mean just resting in God’s grace and truth. It may mean giving over to God some part of our lives we have been withholding. This time of being with God and Scripture may not even be something we can put into words. It is simply being in God’s presence. The last step of *lectio divina* is *incarnatio*, where we acknowledge any ways that God might be transforming us in our inner being or in our outer activities. At the heart of *lectio divina* is the acknowledgment that our relationship with God the Father is primarily through a person—the Word—not words written in a book.”

- Alice Fryling

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