

**Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries  
3 Day Leadership Training Workshop  
Myanmar Baptist Convention Directors  
May 7-9, 2018**

***The Spirit-Led Leader***

**TEACHING NOTES**

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### **Session Topics**

Session 1	Vision, mission, and planning in life
Session 2	An integrated life
Session 3	A deeper spiritual life
Session 4	The practice of the presence of God/Spiritual Practicum
Session 5	Aligning oneself with the purposes of God
Session 6	Spiritual discernment
Session 7	The Spirit-led leader in leadership
Session 8	Spiritual Practicum: <i>Lectio Divina</i>
Session 9	10 practical tools for the Spirit-led leader
Session 10	10 practical tools (continued)
Session 11	Trusting in God
Session 12	Personal transformation: the heart of Spirit-led leadership
Session 13	Spiritual development in steps and stages
Session 14	Vision, mission, and planning in leadership
Session 15	Preparing for next steps

### **Daily Schedule**

1 <sup>st</sup> Session	8:00-9:15 a.m.
2 <sup>nd</sup> Session	9:30-10:45 a.m.
3 <sup>rd</sup> Session	11:00-12:15 p.m.
Lunch/Rest	12:15-1:45 p.m.
4 <sup>th</sup> Session	1:45-3:00 p.m.
5 <sup>th</sup> Session	3:15-4:30 p.m.
Q&A	4:30-5:00 p.m.

## **SESSION 1—Vision, Mission, and Planning**

75 Minutes

### **Introductions**

- Introduce Tim Geoffrion (Jeffry-on)
- Participants go around the room (Name, where you’re from, and what your ministry role is. Name tags?)
- Slides introducing us, family, ministry
- Explain I or someone else will be taking photos
- Request for permission

### **Expectations/Community Standards...To make our workshop go smoothly**

#### Community Standards

1. No cell phones. Please turn them off during the sessions.
2. Please attend all sessions.
3. Limit your coming and going out of the room to break times.
4. Please raise your hand when you have a question or something to contribute to the group and stand when you speak to help all of us hear you better.
5. Be punctual. We will start our sessions on time, and you will not want to miss important instructions or teaching.

### **Why this workshop?**

This workshop grows out of my own struggles in ministry and leadership. I found that serving the Lord was a lot harder than I thought, and that I wasn’t all that I thought I was. I was humbled by my limitations, my weaknesses, and my failures. At the same time, through my many struggles, the Lord kept drawing me to himself. I grew in my relationship with him, and over time grew in my ability to let God work through me.

At the core of what I’ve learned is the importance of the Holy Spirit for every aspect of our life, including our leadership and ministry. A turning point came for me in graduate school where I was studying the Bible. My professor was teaching on the Apostle Paul and read 2 Corinthians 3:6: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

God used that moment to help me to see that what I most needed to change in my life and my ministry was not more understanding of the Bible alone. Even more important was the Holy Spirit. We need both—Scripture to know who God is, who Christ is, and what to believe. And we need the Spirit to help us to become alive and to be able to minister, to serve, and to lead by the power of God.

My book, *The Spirit-Led Leader*, and my teaching here this week grew out of my own struggles and searching. In many ways, I am still on the same

journey to increasingly let the Spirit change my life and lead my ministry in real, life-changing and effective ways.

### **The Vision: To Serve Christ as Spirit-Led Leaders**

#### *Purpose of Leadership Development Workshop*

This leadership development workshop is designed, first of all, to help you to experience God’s refreshing presence, to develop a more vital spiritual life, and to consider ways that you can become a more effective, Spirit-led leader.

Consequently, this workshop is intended to function simultaneously on multiple levels.

1. Clearly identify biblical principles and leadership practices in simple terms as a foundation for discussion and personal reflection
2. Provide opportunities for pastors and leaders to examine their own lives in relation to these truths: Where is your practice solid? Where are you weak? Where is your understanding deep? Where is it superficial? Where can you grow?
3. Foster spiritual revitalization through spiritual practices and teaching
4. Provide many practical ideas and tools for personal growth and leadership
5. Provide well packaged material that you can use to teach others

God has a vision for you, as a person and as a leader. His vision for you fits the purposes of Jesus Christ for your church, your city, and your country. I cannot tell you exactly what God wants to do; you have to find the answers to that question. Some of those answers will come from Scripture. Some answers will come from the Holy Spirit. The process of finding those answers will be different for each one of you, but it will most certainly include Scripture, prayer, and applying yourself to create and develop your own vision based on however you think God is leading you.

So, let’s talk about vision.

#### *What is vision?*

Definition: “A vision for life is a picture of who you want to be, what you want to do, and how you want to do it. It’s something that you want for your life that is not yet a reality. Vision is a way to express the desires of your heart, the hopes of your imagination, the intention of your will, and the creation of your mind—all fed and shaped by the leading by the Holy Spirit. In other words, vision is a compelling picture of a destination where you want to go and believe God is leading you.” —Tim Geoffrion, 2011

In the Bible, we can find many different stories about people who received unique callings from God to pursue or embrace a vision for their life. Think of Abraham; Jacob; Joseph; Moses; Samuel; David; Esther; Mary; Joseph; Peter; Paul; and Jesus. All of these individuals were dependent upon God for their calling; and yet everyone

was actively engaged in the process of listening, asking questions, praying, seeking discernment, making plans, and taking action.

(S) When Israel was in captivity in Babylon, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the prophet Isaiah called the Israelites to rekindle their hopes and dreams for their future, based on God’s vision for their future.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”  
(Isaiah 43:18-19, NIV)

Through Isaiah, the Lord was calling Israel to believe the vision, take hope from it, and to order their lives by it.

(S) In the New Testament, Paul held out a vision for the church. He envisioned that each member of the church would grow up into Christ, with each one maturing in faith, developing their gifts, and contributing the well-being of the whole body.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:15-16, NIV)

Why did he share this vision with the Ephesians? He did it so that they would know what to think about their purpose as individuals and as a church. He wanted them to direct their minds toward the vision and to live by it. In this case it means that they needed to know their spiritual gifts and to use them in the service of the body of Christ.

Throughout Scripture, God offers visions to the people of faith in order to encourage them to believe that he has something great in mind for their future that is not yet a present reality. We are invited to look for the vision that God has for us as individuals and for us as a community of believers. We need to look at how God has uniquely made each of us so that we may discern our unique contributions to the body of Christ as a whole.

Then, at the core of our ability to know God’s vision for our lives and to fulfill it, is the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul teaches us to seek to be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. We are called to “live by the Spirit” and to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25), so that we may be empowered to know and to fulfill God’s vision and dreams for our life.

What is Mission?

Mission: The work (objectives and priorities) that you have to do in order to pursue your vision—“What are the principal activities I will do in order to become or to create what will be when the vision is realized?”

What is a Plan?

A Plan: The set of little, concrete steps you have to take in order to pursue your mission and vision. Action steps should be specific, measurable, timely, and answer the questions, “What? When? Where? With whom?”

DIAGRAM: Vision, Mission, Plan, Obstacles, Strategies, Help

Mission ----->----->----->VISION  
Plan : → → → → → → → // (Obstacles/challenges)  
Strategies to overcome the challenges → → →

We can use this model for strategic planning for any area of our lives. In this workshop, we’re going to focus mainly on just two important areas: your relationship with God and your leadership in ministry.

## **SESSION 2—Integrated Living**

75 Minutes

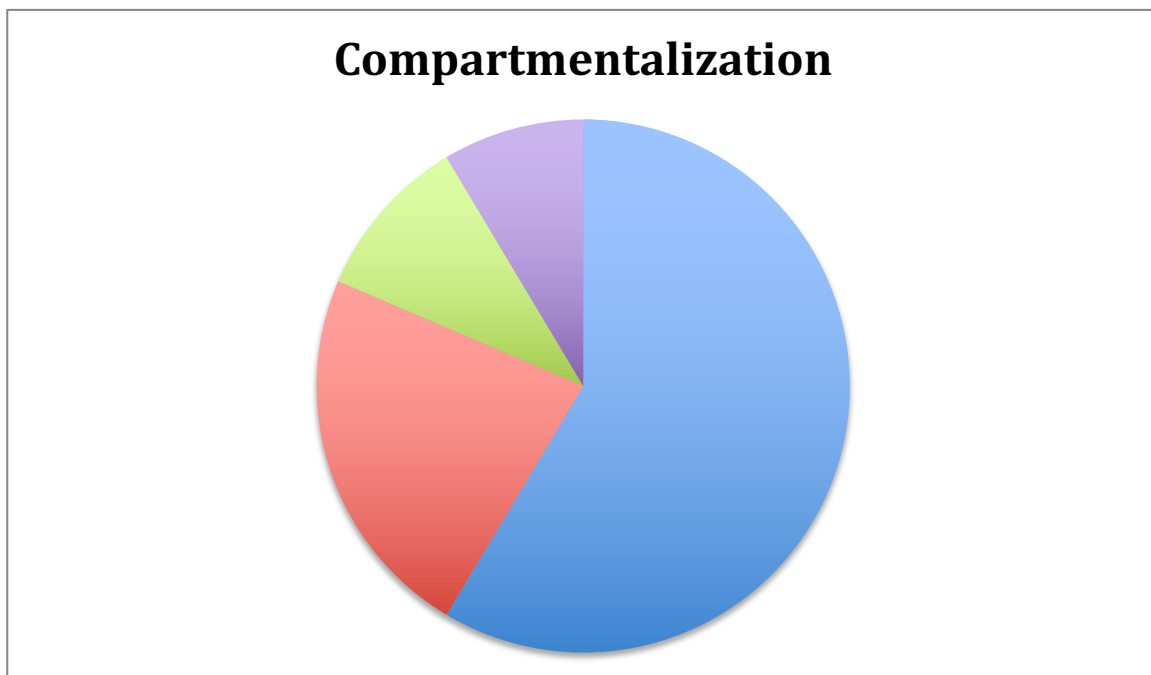
The first practice and principle for Spirit-led leadership is this:

**Leadership Practice 1** Envision your leadership flowing out of a deep spiritual life.  
**Soul Principle 1** Fruitfulness in leadership requires the work of God in and through us.

What we’re really talking about here is learning to live a more integrated life. But integration is not something that many of us do naturally—especially men.

### **Vision for Integrated Spiritual Leadership (15 minutes)**

One of the biggest factors that holds us back from becoming the Spirit-led individuals, friends, and leaders God has called us to be is something called “compartmentalization.” We separate our spiritual life from our marriage, from our parenting, from our leadership, from our relationships with our neighbors, and from other aspects of our life.



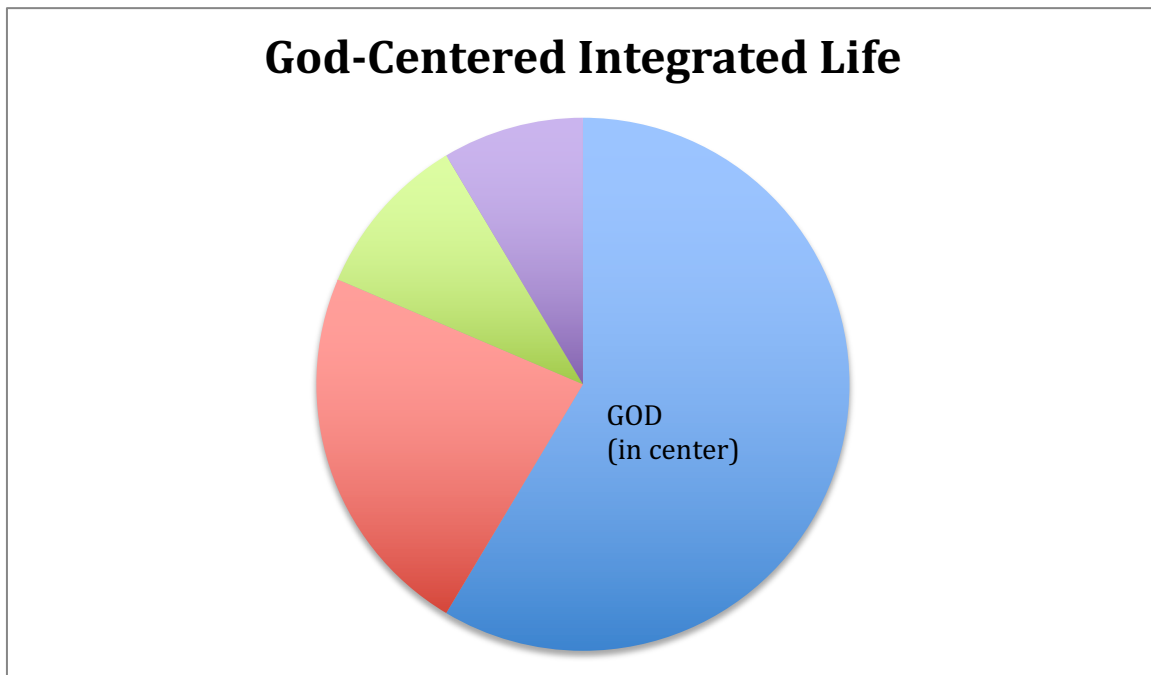
Compartments: Family, Spouse, Church, Work, Service, Interests, Sex, Passions/Dreams, Health, God/Faith, etc.

Cf. 7 F’s (Tim Schmidt): Family, Fun, Friends, Finances, Fellowship, Faith, etc.

A problem arises when we have some compartments that leave God out. We become different people in different contexts, or, we don’t let one aspect of our life influence another. We may be a godly worship leader on Sunday morning and mistreat our

wives and children on Sunday night. We may preach a good sermon one day, and lie, cheat or steal another day. We may love our friends and families but hate our neighbors. Compartmentalization like this is contrary to the life that Jesus lived and that he taught his disciples to live.

Instead of leaving God out of some of the compartments in our life, we are called to place God (or Jesus Christ) at the center of our lives. Then, we must fully integrate every aspect of our life by the power of the Holy Spirit. When our lives are well integrated, we will have a consistency that brings the different parts of our life into harmony with each other.



God (Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit) is at the center of our beings, flowing into every compartment, unifying the purpose, power, perspective, and ultimately the person, so we are the same person in every context.

*Paul's Vision of an Integrated Life (10 minutes)*

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul portrays the integrated life in a different way. Listen especially for his vision of the ideal Christian. He writes,

For this reason, since the day we heard [of your faith and love], we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10)

*Picture.* Here’s Paul’s picture of the fully mature Christian person: We will be living a life that is both pleasing to God and worthy of Christ. It grows out of a depth of spiritual maturity and shows itself in a life of bearing fruit in every good work. (Cf. Psalm 1)

Thus, the more we mature spiritually, the more we will integrate who we are, what we do, and how we do it.

WHO—the “who” of our calling is to become a person of deep spiritual maturity—filled with love for God and spiritual wisdom and understanding;  
WHAT—the “what” is all the good that we do in our lives to serve God; and  
HOW—the “how” of our calling is to live and work in such a way that pleases the Lord and is worthy of him.

This is a picture of a spiritually integrated person—who we are, what we do, and how we do it, all flow from the same Source—God. It is a picture of Spirit-filled and Spirit-led individuals active in the world serving Christ.

*For Self-Reflection—Individually (10 minutes)*

1. Where is my life still too compartmentalized?
2. What do I need to do to make Christ more central to my life and leadership?

### **The Work of Integration (30 minutes)**

The work of integrating our relationship with God and every other aspect of our life can be very challenging. The road to greater spiritual maturity is often long and difficult. We have to cultivate an ability to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, and we need to develop our ability to more naturally and comfortably cooperate with the Spirit’s leading.<sup>1</sup> To these ends, several basic attitudes or behaviors are particularly helpful on an everyday basis: humility, openness, and responsiveness.

**1. Be humble.** For many of us, we don’t have to work at being humble. Life does it to us! Yet, at the same time, sometimes it can be hard to face the truth about our own failings or weaknesses. We are too embarrassed or afraid that we can’t bear seeing ourselves in such a light. When we resist humility, we create barriers in our relationship with God. Our pride may create an artificial sense of well-being (we feel better in the moment), but it blocks our ability to receive from God what we most need—perhaps forgiveness, encouragement, kindness, guidance, or some other kind of help that could authentically improve our relationship with Christ or our situation.

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<sup>1</sup> For many specific suggestions and examples on how to better listen to and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, see Timothy C. Geoffrion, *Saying Yes to God: How to Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

Worse, we may create an unhealthy relationship with God, seeking to relate to God from our perceived strengths or assumed superiority to others. Jesus spoke out against such arrogance and the spiritual consequences of such a prideful attitude in his parable of the Pharisee and publican.

[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14, NRSV)

Both James and Peter warn against undue spiritual pride. If we try to puff ourselves up before God, we will be humbled. If, instead, we humble ourselves by throwing ourselves on the mercy of God, we will experience God’s grace lifting us up. Quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures, they both remind their readers: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

To choose humility is simply being willing to face the truth about ourselves that we would rather not face. For example, we admit to ourselves that our work isn’t up to par sometimes. We have to admit that we do not always reflect Christ well in our thoughts and behaviors, and in fact do a disservice to the cause of Christ at times. We have to acknowledge our mistakes and deal with whatever problems we may have unwittingly created, and not try to bluff our way through hard conversations with others to avoid being exposed. We have to be willing to ask for help when we need it. If we are humble, we will accept that we need others in order to accomplish what God has called us to do, or to more effectively in whatever we’re doing.

Choosing to be humble is not self-denigration. Humility is simply being honest with yourself about your limitations and failings and admitting your need for the mercy and grace of God. That’s where it starts. Where it goes is a richer, deeper relationship with God, based on a beautiful combination of humbleness before God and confidence from God based on the greatness of his love and his provision for your spiritual needs through Christ. You bend your knees, and God pulls you to your feet. You acknowledge your unworthiness to demand or expect anything from God.

You find that you can now hear the voice of the Holy Spirit who wants to minister to you and give you the help that you need.

The writer to the Hebrews sums up the movement from humility to confidence in God this way: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16, NIV).

**2. Be open to the Holy Spirit.** A second important attitude that will help you to be able to better listen to the Holy Spirit and then cooperate more freely and fully is openness. Be as open as you know how to be to whatever God might want to say to you, and let God change you through your encounter with the Holy Spirit. Be open to let the Holy Spirit show you things about yourself that are getting in the way of your relationship with Christ, but you have either not been able to see or you simply don’t want to see them. If you’re having trouble being humble before God, for example, there’s an easy remedy. Ask God to show you your pride, your stubbornness, your selfishness, your thirst for power, your craving for fame, your greed, your fear or anything else that is interfering you with your ability to listen to or cooperate with the Spirit.

Jesus taught us that if we sin, we are slaves to sin. What we need are to listen to his teachings and be set free from sin, because, as he put it, “the truth will set you free” (John 8:31, NIV). If you want to be free, you need to know the truth—the truth about what God wants for your life, and the truth about what’s really going in our life. To know the truth, you have to be open to it.

**3. Be responsive to whatever the Spirit reveals.** Once you know the truth, you need to take action. When the Spirit reveals something to you, you need to cooperate with his moving in your life, either by taking action that is within your power to take, or by asking for the grace to be able to change what you cannot change on our own. Jesus and other prophets and preachers in the Judeo-Christian tradition called believers “to repent” (e.g., Matthew 4:17)—to turn away from what is not right or unhelpful in order to align your will and your ways with God’s intentions for your life. The Apostle Paul talked about being responsive to the Holy Spirit’s prompting as “obedience”, “keeping in step with the Spirit,” and offering ourselves as slaves to righteousness instead of slaves to sin. (Romans 6:11-17; Galatians 5:16-24) The Apostle John described responsiveness to the word of God as moving out of the darkness to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7).

The opposite of openness and repentance is a closed mind and a hardened heart.

The more closed you are, and the more hardened, the harder it is hear to the voice of the Spirit, and you will suffer the consequences of not listening and cooperating. It is a hopeful and wonderful thing to hear and cooperate with the Holy Spirit, but to harden our hearts or to ignore the Spirit’s leading only leads to suffering, hurt, and all kinds of harmful outcomes. This is one reason the writer to the Hebrews warns his readers to not only listen, but to stay open for fear of what will be the result if they do not. He writes, “Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’” (Hebrews 4:7, NIV).

The Christian can only stand by the mercy and grace of God, but do not think that God’s generosity toward us will spare any of us from the consequences of ignoring the voice of the Spirit. God is patient, kind, and slow to anger, but it remains his will that we repent—or change our ways to bring our lives more in line with his will. Paul put it this way: [do not] “...show contempt for the riches of [God’s] kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance” (Romans 2:4, NIV). Thanks to the mercy and grace of God, the more open you are to the Spirit, God will lead you into the repentance that he requires of you, and the more you will be surprised, pleasantly surprised, by all that God will do in you and through you for good.

Christians who pray in *the Ignatian tradition* of spiritual formation, ask God for the grace to be able to see their sin, to be grieved by it, and to be able to experience real change in their life. All growth, then, depends on the grace of God at work within us in a dynamic way. In other words, the grace of God enables us to see what we need to see and to be able to make the changes that are called for.

#### **4. Trust that God is for you, not against you.**

You might think this goes without saying, but sometimes our own shame or feelings of unworthiness can make us doubt God’s goodness. Sometimes seeing so many kids suffering may make us wonder if God really cares. Sometimes, our own guilt makes us afraid to open up to God for fear that He is going to come down on us. But all such fears and doubts block our ability to receive from God what we most need.

What’s the alternative? Trust that God does care and is for you, not against you. Go to God and ask Him to speak to you what He most wants to say. And you might be very surprised (on the upside) what happens.

Illustration: One time, I was praying with a Scripture text from John 21 (vv. 15-20). For years, every time I read the verses where Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, and tells him to feed his sheep, I feel this surge of

emotion. I keep wondering if God is calling me back into the pastoral ministry. But how can I do that and to the teaching ministry to which I also believe God has called me?

This time when I read it and felt the same pain I realized that what I was feeling was not a calling, but guilt. After 24 years, I was still feeling guilty about how I left my first church. I had been a pastor for 4 years and had worked out a deal whereby I could start my doctoral work. My hours at the church would be reduced, and my wife’s hours would be increased. However, when our second child was born prematurely, it became clear that she could not only not increase her hours but would have to decrease them.

I decided to resign from the church and go to school full time. What I didn’t anticipate was how much the church would suffer because of my rather sudden decision, and how difficult it would be for them to find a new pastor. For 24 years I have been carrying around a lot of guilt for what happened, and in that moment of listening to the Spirit, I suddenly knew what I needed to do. I needed to ask for forgiveness for being too immature and inexperienced to know how my decision would affect me, my wife, and the church. Instead of trying to justify myself or excuse myself, I simply accepted my part in causing other people pain, confessed it to God, and unexpectedly felt peace. What a surprise. What a gift. I now feel more freedom to let go of what I cannot change from the past, and freer to focus on the teaching ministry that God has given me in the present.

## **5. Stop trying to have the best of both worlds—serving God and serving yourself.**

*“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” (Titus 2:11-13)*

Spirit-led living requires renouncing every impulse and way that leads away from God. Spirit-led living means continually redirecting one’s thoughts, will, and behavior toward God’s good purposes. Spirit-led living

will ask over and over again, “What will best serve Christ in this situation/relationship/ministry?”

**6. Listen to others better.**

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (Proverbs 1:5).*

By listening well to others, I mean we actually have to be open and disciplined enough to hear their words and to take in their meaning. By listening to others well, we will let God speak to us through others better. We will learn more of what we need to learn about ourselves and about the people we are trying to lead.

Illustration: One of the best relationships I have is with my brothers. Yet, sometimes those relationships are very painful. Sometimes one of my brothers will get angry with me. They will accuse me of not treating them properly. It hurts to hear that, but what they are saying to me is exactly what I need to hear. Why? Because they are telling me the truth. They are telling me what others may be afraid to tell me. Their words of truth are my hope, because they help me to see my sin and they call me to repentance.

**7. Face conflicts with confidence in God and yourself.**

Some of us go out of control when it comes to conflicts, and we go after others that make us mad with all the force we have. Others of us are so busy trying to please everyone that we don’t take a stand or face the conflicts squarely. I don’t know where you fit on the spectrum from bull to baby, but if you want the Holy Spirit to be part of your inter-personal relationships, you need to think about, “How would the Holy Spirit want me to act in this or that situation?”

Instead of avoiding conflict, work out your relationships with others and face conflicts. Find respectful ways to express your true feelings and thoughts, and deal with whatever you need to deal with. Have confidence in yourself and in God to work through inter-personal relationship issues and conflict; and then do something about it.

### **SESSION 3— Developing a Deeper Spiritual Life**

75 Minutes

We are talking about becoming better Spirit-led leaders. We talked about the dangers of dividing our lives up into compartments while leaving God out of certain aspects of our life. Instead, God wants his Holy Spirit to be flowing into and through every dimension of our life. This is what it means to be a Spirit-led person.

Now, in order for us to become more Spirit-led, we have to deepen our spiritual life by developing a deeper relationship with God.

You may know this truth already. But how well are you living by it?

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 2:** Actively cultivate your own spiritual life.  
**Soul Principle 2:** Spiritual vitality flows from a real change of heart, mind and practice toward God.

For some of you, this leadership practice is the most important thing you will hear all week long. If we do not attend to this one simple, basic practice, everything else we do will be affected.

If we do not maintain (develop) a deep, personal relationship with God, we are going to run into trouble.

- First of all, our love for God and Jesus Christ may grow cold. Then,
- We may lose our motivation for Christian service.
- We may start to lose our faith.
- We may lack the spiritual resources needed to serve effectively.
- We will lack the power and wisdom to address challenging situations.
- We may start trying to serve Christ out of our own power, and our ministries may start developing in ways contrary to the will of God.

So, how do we do cultivate a deeper relationship with God?

#### *God's Initiative*

Sometimes, the call to be “more” spiritual just feels like pressure. It may feel like one more “to do” on already overwhelming list of expectations and responsibilities. Sometimes the push comes from external sources or from within ourselves. Either way, thinking that we have to be something spiritually that we are not can make us feel a wide of range of negative emotions. We may feel inadequate, frustrated, or sad. We may feel ashamed or embarrassed that we are not more spiritually mature. We may feel like giving up or just plain mad.

When we feel any of these negative and counterproductive feelings, it probably means we are stuck. Like a car that sinks into the mud, we may spin our tires, but we go nowhere. We may mistakenly think our spiritual growth depends on us, or,

worse, that God has abandoned us. Our spiritual life may start to feel like a chore. When we start to feel anything of these things, it is time for a fresh start.

To this end, Martin Smith’s positive approach to prayer and connecting with God has been transformative for me personally.<sup>2</sup> Smith talks about the times we become aware of something in our life that doesn’t meet God’s expectations. For example, we realize that we are not reading our Bibles very much or praying or loving our neighbor. At those times, Smith suggests that the pinpricks of guilt are actually a positive sign that God is communicating with us.

When God reminds us that we haven’t spent time in prayer, the Lord is not trying to condemn or discourage us. The Holy Spirit is giving us a loving reminder of where our life comes from and where we may go for support and help. God is not waiting with folded arms for us to initiate contact with him through our quiet times and prayer. God has already initiated and is simply waiting for our reply. (Analogy of answering a phone call rather than making a call.... God has a history of initiating: he created the world; made covenants with Abraham, Moses, David; sent Jesus; sent the Holy Spirit.)

Drawing on Smith’s insights, I have re-trained myself to say “thank you” when I am reminded of a failing or lack in my life. “Thank you, God, for bringing my need to my attention and for helping me to remember you and your calling on my life.” “Thank you for reminding me that sin undermines the abundant life Christ intends for me. Thank you for calling me to refocus my mind and heart.”

I’ve found this to be a very helpful strategy. Instead of feeling worse than I already did, I feel encouragement. Instead of thinking God is criticizing me, I think that God cares enough to lead me back toward him. I view the reminder as help, not condemnation. So I say, “Thank you, Lord.”

#### *Our Responsibility: Be More Intentional*

Since we have a God who reaches out to us before we reach out to him, you can know that this God loves you very much. In return, God wants you to love him back.

God wants you to make an earnest effort to develop your relationship with Him, so that your love for God will grow. That’s why the apostle Paul said that he worked harder than anyone else to grow spiritually, even though he also acknowledged that his growth was due to God’s grace at work in him. (1 Cor. 15:10.)

Then, as your relationship with God grows deeper and stronger, you will also increasingly experience the power of God at work in you and through you. So, what should you do?

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<sup>2</sup> *The Word is Very Near You. A Guide to Praying with Scripture* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1989), pp. 19-22.

*Biblical Perspectives—Four priorities for spiritual growth*

1. Matthew 22:36-38. Seek a more loving, living relationship with God.

Matt. 22:36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Matt. 22:37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

Matt. 22:38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

To cultivate our spiritual lives we must do more than just believe right or do the right behaviors. Spiritual depth includes a growing ability to listen to God and to experience God in ways that transform our relationship to God, life and ministry. In other words, spiritual depth is about a loving, living relationship with God, not just obeying rules and doing good deeds.

2. Matthew 22:39-40; Colossians 3:12-14. Let God’s love within you overflow better to others = Obedience.

Matt. 22:39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

Matt. 22:40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Col. 3:12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Col. 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Col. 3:14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

3. Colossians 3:15-17. Root your spiritual life more fully in Jesus Christ.

Col. 3:15 ¶ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Col. 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Christian spirituality requires faith in Christ and a real relationship with Christ. This begins by trusting in Christ as our Savior—the one who died for our sins. It goes on to include knowing the peace of Christ in our hearts and in our relationships with each other. When our spiritual life is rooted in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we can be thankful for all Christ has done for us. Christ’s word found in Scripture can feed us. His word through the Holy Spirit can speak to us and guide us as we worship and relate to one another.

Christian spirituality puts Jesus Christ right in the center with God the Father. We are called to live for our Lord Jesus and to govern all that we do by his will and authority.

4. Romans 8:6, 13-14; Galatians 5:16-26. Learn to live more consistently by the Holy Spirit.

There is no Christian spirituality without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit at work in us to give us a new quality of life (called, “eternal life”) and to lead us in to live as God intends for us.

Greed, envy, jealousy, lust, hatred, violence or any kind of sin quenches the Holy Spirit and leads to all sorts of trouble and suffering. So, the Spirit helps us in our struggle with these incessant voices and impulses, teaching us how to find more and more freedom from their power. The Spirit also helps us to guard our hearts and minds from those things that dull or steal away our hunger, thirst and love for God. In other words, Holy Spirit helps us to say “no” to sin, and “yes” to what’s good and right and loving (Titus 2:11-14).

To grow spiritually, then, includes growing in our ability to listen to and follow the Spirit. We will recognize the Spirit’s prompting and cooperate better with the Spirit’s leading. We will learn to recognize the influence of sin in our lives more quickly. We will develop a more critical reaction and distress over sin’s presence. We will choose to draw on the Holy Spirit more and more in every aspect of our life. This is Spirit-led living.

Important Note: We are not transformed magically into divine beings. Rather, we are given access to divine power so that we can make different choices. When we understand Spirit-led living this way, our expectations will change. We will not expect to always have pure motivations and think perfectly like God. Instead, we will expect to be prompted by our old, basic, sinful, self-seeking and self-serving nature. We will expect to want to react to others out of unhealthy wounds and defensiveness, as a general rule. We will expect to fail often.

However, we will also increasingly learn where to go to find power to resist these impulses. We will learn how to draw on the Holy Spirit to gain freedom from sin’s power. We will call upon the Spirit more regularly for new motivation and power to act in ways that mirror God’s character. Spirit-led living then becomes a way out (from sin) and a way to the life God intends for us—not as a permanent transformation, but as an ongoing resource in the midst of our incomplete transformation.

Q. What observations can you make by looking at this list of four priorities?

1. Note the trinitarian nature of Christian spirituality.
2. Christian spirituality is highly relational.
3. It’s holistic in that it involves mind, heart, and actions.
4. Love is key.

## **SESSION 4—The Practice of the Presence of God**

75 Minutes.

### *Introduction (5 minutes)*

*Brother Lawrence* is responsible for giving the name to the spiritual discipline of “the practice of the presence of God.” Brother Lawrence was not an academic writer or lofty theologian. He lived in community with other Christians in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Paris, France. He had many daily responsibilities. Many of his practices refer to how he communicated with God in the midst of washing dishes or working in the garden or doing any number of other chores throughout the day.

*Definition* “The Practice of the Presence of God” means being aware, attentive and responsive to God’s presence in your life in every conceivable circumstance.

### *Motivation and Goals (for practicing the presence of God)*

- The love of God is the motivation (Oneworld, 1999 edition, p. 12).
- To fulfill God’s will, not your own (p. 10, 32).
- To love and delight yourself in God (p. 20).
- To feed and nourish your soul with a high notion of God (p. 9).

*Comment* You may or may not be in touch with your heart’s desire for God, but it is how you were made—to love God and to be in relationship with God. You may need to pray to be able to sense God’s love for you; you may need to ask God to cultivate your love for God. But each of us was made to be a loving relationship with God—a fact that usually requires that our actively nurturing our longing and love for God. (Cf. M. Craig Barnes, *Searching for Our Home*.)

This leads to methods and practices....

### *Methods and Practices*

- Trust in God in every possible way (pp. 24-26, 63, 79).
- Renounce everything that doesn’t lead to God (p. 30, 46).
- Recognize God as intimately present with you (p. 31).
- Pray for a sense of the presence and love of God (p. 33).
- Worship as often as possible (p. 47, 81).
- Recall God’s holy presence when you have forgotten (p. 47, 78-79).

- Drive away distracting thoughts (p. 47).
- Give simple attention and general fond regard to God; carry on an habitual, silent, and secret conversation with God from your soul (p. 56, 58).
- Always work at it; be devoted and determined (pp. 72-75).
- Think of God that you may know God that you may love God (p. 80, 112).
- Pray for an ability to endure suffering and to see God’s work in your life for good; have courage and faith in the midst of your suffering (pp. 101-105).

*Comment* Clearly, to Brother Lawrence, a spiritual life goes well beyond just believing the right things or living morally or social action, for that matter. Spiritual depth includes a growing willingness and commitment to listen to God, to seek God, to trust God, and to experience God in ways that transform our relationship to God and every aspect of our life.

*Application: Ways to Perceive the Presence of God Throughout the Day (30 minutes)*

In addition to traditional spiritual practices and disciplines, Brother Lawrence suggests that we learn to quietly look for and observe God’s presence all around ourselves—as a way of thinking and a way of life. Drawing on the work of Gerald May and others, here are four ways that we can seek to practice the presence of God in our daily life, inspired by Brother Lawrence.<sup>3</sup>

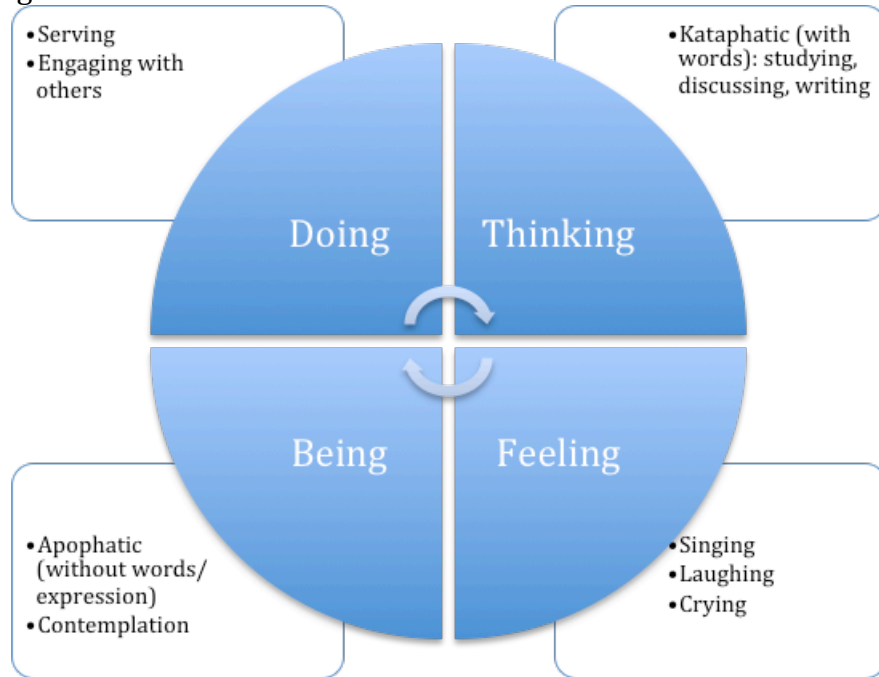
1. It may be brief awareness of God (way #1);  
E.g.’s: a passing chill in the spine—‘tingles’; an ‘ah-ha’—we may suddenly sense that God might be at work here; a perception of a little gift of kindness from God; a sudden ability to see humor in trying circumstances. You may feel more confidence, joy, security, courage or peace.
2. It may be a simple prayer or word that you recite that symbolizes your desire for God (way #2);  
E.g.’s: “Jesus,” “Father,” “Spirit,” “Help me,” “Thank you.”  
E.g., “Be still and know that I am God” (Keep repeating sentence, dropping off one word at a time until only “Be” is left.)
3. It may be an ongoing sense of functioning in the company of God (way #3);  
We can use holy imagination and prayer to look for Jesus’ presence in the midst of our daily lives. We can also imagine Jesus’ presence to help us to work through painful or difficult situations. For example, when you are in conflict with others or are experiencing significant emotional

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<sup>3</sup> The first four methods are adapted from Gerald May’s presentations and writings on the 4 Ways of Brother Lawrence.

pain from a broken relationship, ask Jesus to make his presence known in your heart and mind.

Note: Each of us feel closest to God in different ways, depending on our personalities and preferences. We can group these different ways into four broad categories as follows.



If we gravitate toward “thinking” as a way to be spiritually alive, we may seek an awareness of God’s presence as we read Scripture, study, discuss theology, or write in our journal or essays.

If we are most aware of God’s presence through “feeling,” we may seek to function in the company of God by singing, listening to music, playing music, or engaging in some other feeling-producing activity that lifts our hearts to God and opens our hearts to the Holy Spirit.

If we are “doing” or action-oriented, we may seek a greater awareness of God’s presence as we serve or in the midst of our daily responsibilities. E.g., we might imagine one of the following:

- a) Jesus standing next to us in the midst of an argument with someone;
- b) Jesus is seated at the table when we are making plans;
- c) Jesus shining through us as we feed the hungry or help someone in need;
- d) The Holy Spirit is present as we step into the pulpit.

If we are drawn to seek God through simply “being”, then we may most appreciate the practice of contemplation, Way #4.

4. It may be a state of contemplation through which we seek to commune with God and to become aware of God’s pervasive presence without using conscious thoughts or words (way #4).

We may go for a long walk, sit in a chair and stare out the window, or gently gaze at an object that helps us to focus on God (perhaps a statue or painting of Jesus; the cross; or a beautiful landscape)—not in any way as an “idol,” of course, but as a reminder of God’s love and activity on behalf of humanity. The goal is not to meditate with specific thoughts, but to stay in the presence of God, apart from distractions, without trying to think about anything in particular. We disconnect from our normal ways of thinking and engaging with our world in order to let our sense of connection to God consume our consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

*Examples:* Silence, solitude, or other spiritual disciplines when allow ourselves to simply dwell in God’s presence, whether or not we can immediately perceive God’s presence. E.g., we may close our eyes and not see the person next to us, but still know, believe, and possibly sense his/her presence.

Some may walk a labyrinth. I like to sit in front of a statue of Jesus in the Chartres Cathedral. Perhaps speaking in tongues (without consciously choosing words) may fit into this contemplation, too, because we are extending ourselves toward God without conscious thought.

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<sup>4</sup> See Martin Smith on triune God in Spirit-prompted prayer (pp. 37-38); gazing on Christ (pp. 46ff.); embrace of Father (pp. 51ff.). See chapter nine on “Gazing” (p. 130-142).

**Spiritual Practicum** (40 minutes)

*Solitude and Silence*

*Individually* (30 minutes) Even though there are people all around you, take 30 minutes to find solitude in the midst of the crowd. You can go for a walk, sit in your chair, or lie down somewhere. But do not make contact with others or engage anyone. This is a time for you to be alone with your own thoughts, and with God.

Pay attention to whatever awareness you may have of God’s presence. Respond naturally to whatever happens.

When you are ready, take some time to do the Personal Reflection exercise below.

*For Personal Reflection*

Write out your answers to the following questions:

1. How welcome is God as my constant companion and co-worker?
2. How am I seeking to connect with God throughout my day?
3. What works best to help me stay connected to the Holy Spirit throughout the day?
4. What could I do to connect better with God throughout the day?

*Large Group Debrief of Experience* (10 minutes)

### **Supplemental Information**

The Spirituality Wheel©  
A Spiritual Type Selector  
by Corinne D. Ware, D. Min.

*Exercise* The purpose of this exercise is to DRAW A PICTURE of your personal style of spirituality. Read through the following statements, circling the number corresponding to the statement in each category that best describes your personal belief or preference.

You may select as many statements as you wish; you need not only choose one. Match the chosen statement numbers with the quadrant numbers in the circle on the diagram (see below). Draw a spoke in the appropriate quadrant for each statement selected. The result is a portrait of your personal spiritual type.

#### **THE ORDER OF WORSHIP**

1. A carefully planned and orderly worship service is a glory to God.
2. A deeply moving and spontaneous service is a glory to God.
3. Simplicity and some silence are important elements needed for worship.
4. It is not a service, but ordering ourselves to God’s service that is important.

#### **TIME**

1. It is important to stick to announced beginning and ending times of worship services.
2. It is important to extend the service time if one feels led to do so.
3. All time is God’s time. A sense of timelessness is important.
4. Gather whenever and as long as you need to in order to accomplish the task.

#### **PRAYER**

1. Words express poetic praise; I ask for knowledge and guidance.
2. Let words and feelings evoke God’s presence in this moment.
3. Empty the mind of distractions and simply BE in the presence of the Holy.
4. My life and my work are my prayer.

#### **MUSIC**

1. Music and lyrics express praise to God and belief about God.
2. Singing warms and unites us and expresses the soul’s deepest worship.
3. Music brings the soul to quietness and union with God.

4. Singing can mobilize and inspire to greater effort and dedication.

#### PREACHING

1. The Word of God, rightly proclaimed, is the centerpiece of worship.
2. The gospel movingly preached is the power of God to change lives.
3. Proclamation is heard when the Spirit of God speaks to the inward heart.
4. What we do is our “preaching” and speaks louder than anything we say.

#### EMPHASIS

1. It is important that I fulfill my vocation (calling) in the world.
2. It is important that I learn to walk in holiness with the Lord.
3. It is important that I be one with the Creator.
4. It is important that I obey God’s will completely.

#### SUPPORT OF CAUSES

(If necessary, circle the words that apply and select categories with the most circles.)

1. It is important to support seminaries, publishing houses, scholarship, and preaching.
2. It is important to support evangelism, missions, spreading the word on television and radio.
3. It is important to support places of retreat, spiritual direction, liturgical reform.
4. It is important to support political action to establish justice in society and its institutions.

#### CRITICISM

1. Sometimes I may be too intellectual, dogmatic, and “dry.”
2. Sometimes I may be too emotional, dogmatic, anti-intellectual.
3. Sometimes I may escape from the world and not be sufficiently realistic.
4. Sometimes I may have tunnel vision and be too moralistic.

#### DOMINATING THEMES

(If necessary, circle the words that apply and select categories with the most circles.)

1. Discernment, discipline, knowledge, order, grace, justification.
2. Love, conversion, witness, spontaneity, sanctification.
3. Poverty, humility, wisdom, letting go, transcendence.
4. Simplicity, purity of heart, action, temperance, obedience, martyrdom.

#### CHURCH MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

(What I believe should be necessary)

1. Assent to doctrine; baptism; endorsement by group.
2. A personal inward experience of God; baptism; public declaration.
3. All who face Godward.
4. Solidarity with humankind is membership in God’s kingdom.

#### RITUAL AND LITURGY

1. Ritual and liturgy evoke memory and presence, teaching traditional truths.
2. Liturgy and ritual ceremonies are not of great importance.
3. Ritual and liturgy are ways in which God becomes present to us.
4. Ritual and liturgy are one way we make statements about inner conviction.

#### CONCEPT OF GOD

1. God is revealed in scripture, sacrament, and in Jesus Christ and his cross.
2. I can feel that God is real and that Christ lives in my heart.
3. God is mystery and can be grasped for but not completely known.
4. We participate in the mystery of God when we become co-creators with God in the world.

#### Additional Questions:

When explaining to people about my faith I would use as my primary resource:

1. My church’s statement of faith and Bible verses (adapted by TCG)
2. My own experience of what Jesus and the Church have meant to me
3. Prayer and the experience of the holy
4. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy

When I pray I mostly seek:

1. Insights, guidance or answers
2. A closer walk with the Lord
3. An inner consciousness of God
4. A deeper commitment to God’s reign on earth

Which description of a spiritual pathway best describes your experience?

(If necessary, circle the words that apply and select categories with the most circles.)

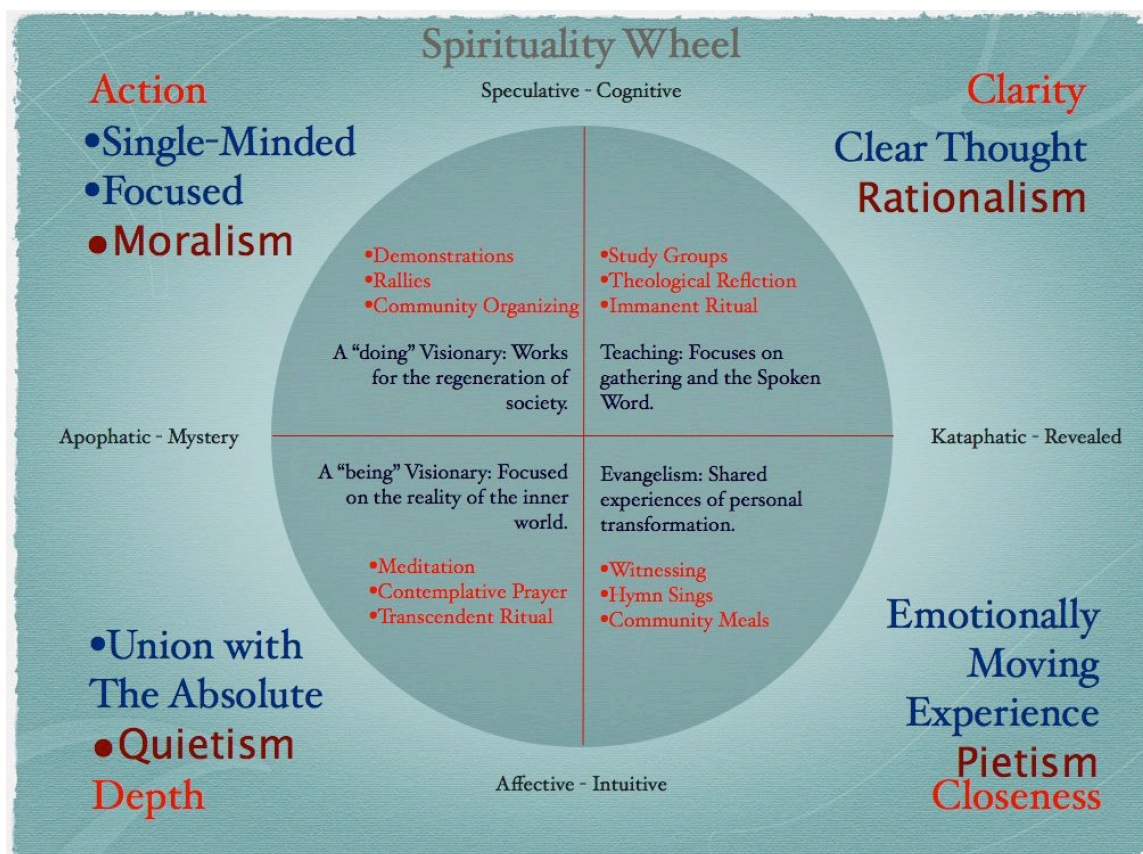
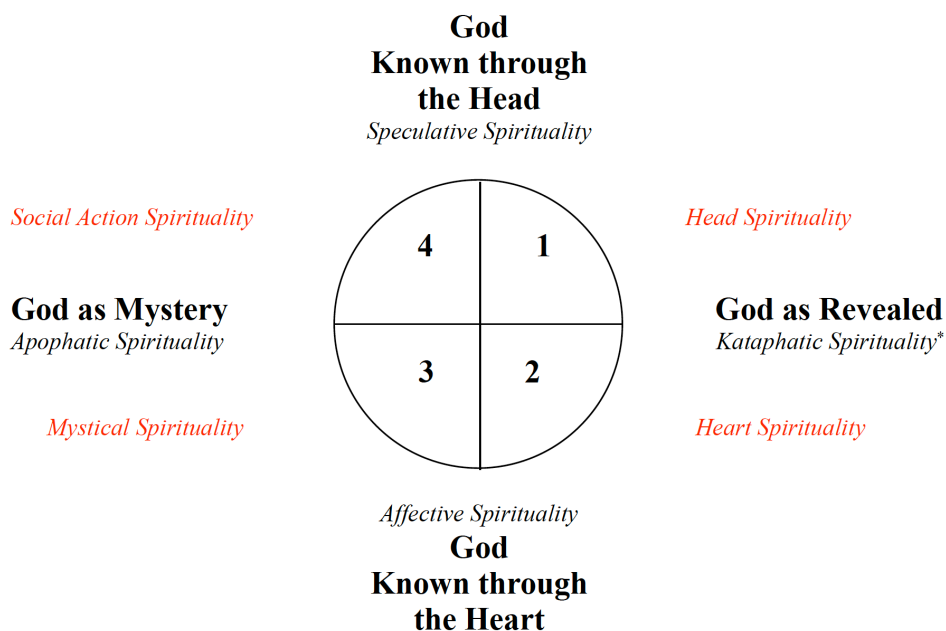
1. Theological renewal, confidence in being right, knowledge, insights, connections, attention, revelation.
2. Personal renewal, holiness in everyday life, born again, emotion, relationships,

devotion, conversion.

3. The inner life, contemplation, stillness, asceticism (spiritual disciplines), union, mystery, awareness.

4. Prophetic witness, the reign of God, social concern, justice, peace, relevance, love in action.

## Spirituality Wheel (©Corinne Ware)



*Discuss 4 Types*

- Type 1 (Head Spirituality) - Danger is Rationalism
  - This is an intellectual “thinking” spirituality that believes strongly in the knowability of Gods (as based on revelation)
  - It favors the concrete (what it can see, touch and imagine)
  - It tends to mistrust mystery and minimize emotions
  - This style produces theological reflection and precision in thinking and communication
  - People attracted to this form of spirituality tend to be rational and logical, valuing precision in their thinking and speech
  - Content is of primary importance to these people
    - ♣ Faith is belief in certain things
  - Congruence of thought, and thought and action, are important
  - Tend to look to the sermon and scriptures for spiritual guidance
  - Tend to be people of the Word and people of words
  - Prayer tends to be language or word-based
  - Spiritual danger is rationalism – an over intellectualization of one’s spiritual life with a consequent loss of feeling and inner conviction
  - Good example would be John Calvin
    - ♣ Father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology
    - ♣ Initially commenced training for the priesthood but came into contact with Protestants whom he felt had a clearer grasp of the Biblical message
    - ♣ At age 27 wrote The Institutes of Christian Religion (which remains one of the great theological treatises of the last four centuries)
    - ♣ Over next 25 years wrote commentaries on all NT books and 23 OT books, all of which were distributed and read throughout Europe, changing the face of the church there, and in the New World
    - ♣ A man of the Word who encouraged a religion of the head that emphasized theological precision and conviction
- Type 3 (Mystical Spirituality) – Danger is Reclusivity
  - This is a mystical spirituality that emphasizes the mystery of faith and the ultimate un-knowability of God
  - Emphasizes that our thoughts about God are always pale and imperfect reflections of his being as he is “wholly other”, unnamable, beyond our

comprehension and containment

- Emphasizes hearing from God over speaking to him
- Goal of spirituality is understood as union with God
- People attracted to this type of spirituality are often contemplative and intuitive, tending to be focused on an inner world that is as real to them as the external one
- Renewal of the inner life is at the core of their understanding of spirituality
- Emphasize the process of spirituality (favoring metaphor of the journey)
- Spiritual danger is reclusivity – an exaggerated retreat from reality and from

interaction with the world, associated with passivity

- Good example of Thomas Merton

- ♣ Twentieth century adult convert to Christianity from a non-religious background, quickly entering training for the priesthood and subsequently entering the Cistercian monastic order
- ♣ Spend the rest of his life in contemplative prayer and writing books and talking with others about such life of prayer as mystical union with God

- Type 2 (Heart Spirituality) – Danger is Emotionalism

- Here God is still understood to be knowable, but more through the heart than the head
- If God is love, assumption is that he must be known through love, not simply known through ideas
- Spirituality is not, therefore, a head trip – it’s all heart
- Theology still important and Scriptures seen to be the source of our knowing of God
- But our response to knowing God is expected to involve heart, not just head
- Result is a more charismatic spirituality whose aim is to achieve holiness of life
- Personal holiness is the goal of spirituality
- Prayer is made with words but words may be used less formally and prayer is often extemporaneous, spontaneous and even exuberant
- Of primary importance is experience
- Spiritual danger is excessive emotionalism and the belief that emotion is the test of the validity of a person’s spiritual experience
- Another danger is an exclusive spirituality that results in an “us against the world” mentality that fails to recognize the spiritual experience of those in

other spiritual traditions

→ Good example of Type 2 Spirituality is John Wesley – the founder of the Methodist Church and what has been called the Holiness tradition

- ♣ As a university student at Oxford, he and his brother (Charles) started a club dubbed as the Holy Club – later to be called the Methodists for their emphasis on the methods of bible study and other spiritual disciplines

- ♣ Emphasized the spiritual journey as growth in love of God

- ♣ Not known as a systematic theologian, but rather as one who inspired others in their love of God and commitment to a life of holiness

- Type 4 (Social Justice Spirituality) – Danger is Moralism

- Mystical experience is here coupled with an intellectual mode of gathering data

- Result is an active visionary who is single-minded with a deeply focused, almost crusading, type of spirituality

- People of this type often minimize importance (or value) of denominational

- affiliation (or even affiliation with organized religion)

- Goal is simply to obey God and in so doing, transform society by contributing to the establishment of God’s Kingdom

- These people equate prayer and theology with action

- They have strong vision and ideals, but are not content to live with ideas – ideas always translate into action

- Spiritual danger lies in a moralistic and unrelenting tunnel-vision that excludes or judges others who do not share their passion

- Good example is St. Francis of Assisi

- ♣ 12th century Italian who left his former life of privilege and went about the countryside caring for the poor and sick

- ♣ Soon was followed so many others that even the Pope took notice and named them an order

- ♣ Had a profound effect on not only the spirituality, but on disease and poverty, throughout Europe

## **Supplemental Information**

### Spiritual Disciplines

A **disciplined Christian** is someone who consciously focuses their mind, heart, and actions on God, who is at the center of their life. We know that being disciplined is important, but for many of us being disciplined is very hard. By nature, we tend to put ourselves at the center of our lives, as we talked about earlier. We also like to be free to do whatever we want to do; and it’s easy to get distracted, or to lack willpower.

Yet the truth is: Discipline is our friend. Discipline is key to growing spiritually, and to becoming more effective pastors and leaders. And practicing specific spiritual disciplines is important to us for developing a deeper relationship with God.

**Spiritual disciplines** refer to specific habits and practices by which Christians order their life. These disciplines help us to grow spiritually.

Brother Lawrence’s approach to cultivating a richer spiritual life represents a way of thinking and being in the world. Other helpful spiritual practices are known as spiritual disciplines—which are extensions of everything we have been talking about.

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 3:** Develop specific spiritual disciplines.

**Soul Principle 3** Disciplines deepen our spiritual life and empower our leadership and relationships.

Definitions: A spiritual practice is anything one does as an expression of faith or attempt to relate to God. A spiritual discipline is a spiritual practice that one does on a regular basis.

What spiritual practices and disciplines have been the most helpful to you in your spiritual life?

[Examples: daily devotions of Bible reading and prayer; meditation; Bible memory; regular worship; journal writing; solitude; silence; retreat days; week long retreat; Sabbath; rest; service project; small prayer/accountability group; spiritual direction/mentoring; Christian fellowship; showing mercy; visiting those who are suffering; fasting; sharing testimonies with one another; giving; *lectio divina*; singing praises to God; contemplation; forgiving others; helping widows and orphans; repentance; using our spiritual gifts; sharing Gospel; beholding God’s creation; praying with others; obedience to God and to those in authority over us; Lord’s supper/communion; good stewardship; sacrificial giving; service projects with others; reproaching/encouraging others.]

**Richard Foster<sup>5</sup>**

*The Inward Disciplines*

1. Meditation
2. Prayer
3. Fasting

Pastor John March: Fasting -- Advent is one of the two seasons in the Christian calendar when fasting is encouraged. During Lent, fasting is encouraged for the mortification of the flesh, the denial of our sinful desires. During Advent we fast to heighten our anticipation for the second coming of Christ. We give something up that we enjoy so that we can remind ourselves that this world is not our home. In denying our longing for that thing, that comfort from which we fast, we remind ourselves that there is nothing in this world that can ultimately satisfy our longing for God. So we fast and say, "Maranatha, Lord!" which means "Come, Lord!"

4. Study

*The Outward Disciplines*

1. Simplicity
2. Solitude
3. Submission
4. Service (e.g., James 1:27)

*The Corporate Disciplines*

1. Confession
2. Worship
3. Guidance
4. Celebration

**Bible Study: The Holy Spirit's Role**

The Holy Spirit has a very important role in helping us grow spiritually and in practicing spiritual disciplines.

*Reflection on Romans 8:1-30*

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual life, according to Romans 8?

>> The Holy Spirit is *the* key to living a spiritually vital life

1. The Spirit sets us free from “the law of sin and death.” (8:2)
2. The Spirit reveals the will of God and shows us the way forward. (8:5-6)

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<sup>5</sup> Foster, R. J. *Celebration of Discipline: 25th Anniversary Edition*. San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. See, Foster, R. J., and Kathryn A. Yanni. *Celebrating the Disciplines: A Journal Workbook to Accompany Celebration of Discipline*. New York, HarperCollins, 1992.

3. The Spirit empowers us to say no when we need to say no and yes when we need to say yes. (8:12-14; cf. Titus 2:11-14)
  4. The Spirit draws us into an intimate relationship with God as “Abba, Father.” (8:15)
  5. The Spirit teaches us to wait when we need to wait. (e.g., 8:18-25)
  6. The Spirit prays for us and through us. (8:26-27)
  7. The Spirit helps us to let go when situations are out of our hands, and to trust in God’s goodness and working to accomplish God’s purposes, which include our salvation and transformation. (8:28-30)
- What are the implications for our spiritual practices and disciplines?
    1. Seek to be well-connected to the Holy Spirit.
    2. Listen and follow the Spirit’s leading (cf. Gal. 5:22-25).
    3. Pray with the Spirit.

### *Journal Writing*

1. What is *one* spiritual practice or discipline God may be inviting me to undertake? Suggestion: Ask Jesus for help in discerning God’s leading. Then tell Jesus what you want him to do for you. Listen for whatever may come from this conversation with Jesus.
2. What are the concrete steps I need to take to follow the way clarified by Jesus?
3. What are the obstacles or challenges that need to be overcome in order to spend more time with God? (Examples: poor time management, need to prioritize demands, need to undo bad habits, not sure where to go for resources, lack of energy, need accountability or support from others)
4. What do I sense God is leading me to do next?

### Suggestions:

- Start small—try one thing for one week.
- Step outside of your comfort zone and routine—Try one new spiritual practice this year.
- Get help and support—find a kindred spirit, spiritual director, fellow pastor
- Ask God for help—Ask God to open your heart, open the way, and provide the resources needed

### **Practice (Richard Rohr, Daily Meditation, April 30, 2016)**

Mind + Heart + Body Awareness

Heart: loving-kindness meditation, deep listening, community, journaling

Mind: *lectio divina* (sacred reading), writing, dialectic argument, study

Body: ecstatic dance, meditative walking, chant

## **SESSION 5—Aligning with God’s Purposes**

75 Minutes

### **Introduction** (5 minutes)

Pastor Rick Warren from Saddleback Church in California wrote two books about living with purpose. First he wrote, *The Purpose-Driven Church* and then, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. His books have struck a chord with many Christians. Many of us want to know that we have a purpose in life, that we can know it, and that we can live it out. At the heart of his books is a perspective that we as Christian ministers and leaders should know very well: Our purpose in life is not to serve ourselves. Our purpose is to serve God.

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 4** Always seek to serve God’s purposes first and foremost.

**Soul Principle 4** Aligning our will with God’s is an all-encompassing, ongoing process.

### **Biblical Teaching** (40 minutes)

#### *General Will and Specific Will of God*

When talking about God’s will and serving God’s purposes, I’ve found it very helpful to distinguish between the general will of God and the specific will, and then to break down the specific will of God into three different categories.

The “**general will**” of God is that which is true for every Christian and does not require a special revelation to us. We can think this will in the three parts, each one relating to a different member of the Trinity.

Each of us is called...

1. To know, love, and serve God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength.
2. To follow Jesus Christ and to become more and more like him. (In Romans 8:29, Paul says, God intends that we “become conformed to the (very) image of Christ.” And in the 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul suggests that believers are transformed into Christ’s likeness over time.)
3. To be filled with the Holy Spirit and to keep in step with the Spirit as we seek to love God and love others as ourselves.

These callings are not goals that can be fully reached in this life. Yet we are called to pursue them all of our life, as God enables us.

The “**specific will**” of God for an individual person flows from the general will of God. In fact, most of what God wants to do in us as individuals and within our churches is a specific application of some general teaching already revealed to us in Scripture.

1. Day to day. God’s specific will for you is how you uniquely live out your life of faith, hope, and love in your particular circumstances, wherever you are, whoever we’re with, in whatever commitments you have made. It’s a way of life.
2. On occasion. In addition, sometimes there is something special for us to do that is out of the ordinary. I call this part of God’s will a **special assignment**. Special assignments from God are out of the ordinary occurrences, often not repeatable.
3. For our lifetime (Vocation/Calling). When God’s calling is to a lifelong work for God, we have a **vocation**. Some theologians believe that any lifework, trade, or profession could be considered a vocation. Others restrict the word specifically to full time Christian ministry or something to which God has specifically called a person. Either way, “vocation” is another category of God’s specific will for a person that differs from God’s general will or a specific assignment, because it refers to a lifelong work.

#### *Biblical Examples*

General will: It is God’s general will that I become a more loving, forgiving person as Christ was.

1. Specific will from day to day (related to general will above): It is God’s specific will for my life that I love my particular wife, Jill, my two children. I also need to act in loving ways in my particular church community. If someone has hurt me, I need to forgive that specific individual—whoever they may be.

- In Philippians, Paul specifically addresses two women by the names of Euodia and Syntyche. He said, in effect, that the general teaching found in chapter 2 on seeking unity and being unselfish needed to be applied to their relationship. (Phil. 4:2)

2. Special Assignment (related to general will above): On occasion, I have felt called to reach out to a particular person in need with Christ’s love to help out, or encourage, or support in some way. Perhaps it is a homeless person I meet, or someone whose car has broken down.

- Biblical example: the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37).
- Bible: Most of the great figures of the Bible discovered God’s specific will for the lives as they were simply going about the normal business of doing God’s general will for their lives.
- Esther was living out her life, based on her desires and opportunities, when all of a sudden a unique opportunity arose to save her people. Her uncle Mordecai suggested that perhaps she was put in that position precisely for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). She received a “special assignment”.

- See Ephesians 2:10.

3. Vocation: If God’s calls us to full time ministry, we don’t need a sign from heaven or a voice to know what to do from day to do. It is God’s will that we order our lives in such a way that we faithfully fulfill our responsibilities.

- The disciples were seeking to be faithful followers of God, when all of a sudden one day Jesus came along and said, “Follow me.” Up to that point, for perhaps 20 or 30 years all they knew was the basic life of faithfulness to God. Then, unexpectedly, a unique opportunity arose. In their case, Jesus’ calling became their vocation. (E.g., Mark 2:14)
- Further, if we have been called to ministry, we have duties to perform. God’s will is for us to be faithful. E.g., Paul instructed Timothy to “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you” (1 Tim. 4:13-14).

*Aligning yourself with God’s Will = Commit yourself to living in sync with God’s will*  
(Romans 12:1-2; John 12:25-26)

Romans 12:1-2

“Offer yourself as a living sacrifice... Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, perfect and pleasing will.” (Romans 12:1-2)

1. Submit yourself to God
2. Offer yourself as a living sacrifice—your life is God’s, while you are still living.
3. Reject worldly, sinful, selfish thinking. (Don’t be conformed to this world.)
4. Be transformed by renewing our thinking (hearts and minds).
5. Then you will be able to discern God’s “good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Thus, the more we focus on what already know to be God’s will for our lives, the more we will be on track to discover and live out God’s specific will. Our calling is to focus on God’s general will and the many specific applications in our everyday life. Then, we can let the special assignments flow out of a life of prayer, faithfulness, and obedience to God’s general will. The more vital our spiritual life, the more prepared we are going to be to recognize God’s special assignments when they arise. And **often, it is only in retrospect**, through the eyes of a transformed mind, that we are able to discern what God’s will has been and is. (Romans 12:2; Example: Joseph only knew the will of God in retrospect. See Genesis 50.)

6. Act in ways that fit with the Gospel of faith, love and service (see rest of Romans 12).

John 12:25-26

7. Set aside what serves only yourself in order to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Hate whatever we find in ourselves that keeps us from following Jesus wholeheartedly.

One of the most shocking and misunderstood sayings of Jesus is found in the Gospel of John. Jesus is talking about discipleship, and at one point he says this:

“The [one] who loves his life will lose it, while the [one] who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. (John 12:25-26, NIV)

Why would Jesus tell us to hate our life? I have pondered this question for many years. I have traveled to many difficult places in the world, where Christians are suffering in many different ways. I have watched and asked questions about what following Jesus really means. None of the great servants of Christ that I know actually hate their lives. Rather, many have devoted themselves to serving Christ’s purposes above all else.

Jesus could not have meant that we should hate ourselves—that would be contrary to everything else taught in Scripture. Rather he’s saying this: don’t give much attention to your will and to what serves you. Rather think about what God wants. And if there is some part of you that is actually contrary to the will of God, hate that.

Illustration: Whenever you or I take a step toward God, or take a step to follow Jesus, and we feel something holding us back (a habit, a mindset, a sin, a love)—that’s the thing we are to hate. Jesus is calling us to hate anything that is in our life that ties us up, distracts us, or makes us stumble or fall away or get off track.

**Serving God’s Purposes in Leadership** (20 minutes)

These same principles hold for our leadership and positions of influence: Spirit-led leaders will submit themselves to God and commit themselves to following Christ.

Think about where you function as a leader for a moment—it may be in your church, in your family, or in your village. *Are you subordinating all of your other goals to the one main goal: serving God’s purposes with your life and following Jesus?*

Spirit-led leaders learn to regularly stop and ask themselves four hard questions:

1. Why am I in leadership?
2. Whose purposes am I serving now?

3. When I must make a decision, does my decision serve my interest or properly serve Christ and others?
4. In times of crisis, is my response coming out of selfishness, or fear, or greed, or from the leading of the Holy Spirit?

*Where we can go wrong (Larry Crabb)*

Christian psychologist and author, *Larry Crabb*, in his book, *Connections*, talks about the dangers of substituting our own agendas for God’s. That is, leaders may use their positions to serve themselves in various ways, and their egos and self-serving instincts interfere with their commitment to follow Christ and serve his purposes. For example, we may try to do one of the following:

- Prove our adequacy (= city building),
- Try to establish our reputation (= light bearing),
- Keep safe (= white washing), or
- Pursue our own pleasure and satisfaction (= well digging).

How many of you have ever fallen into one of these four traps? Everyone! It’s human nature to do so. That is why, we have to be honest with ourselves, and ask God for the grace to let go of selfishness, fear and greed. We need to pray and work to truly serve God’s purposes above all else.

None of us will ever be perfect in this life, but we can hope to lead from our “best self.” Our best self is when we are most attuned to God, most submissive to God’s will, and most Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

*Discussion*

*Spiritual Practice for Realigning Ourselves: Stop, Look and Listen*

My former spiritual director, the late Rev. John Ackerman, developed a simple strategy for to help him stay on track with the Holy Spirit and God’s will. It’s called, “Stop, look and listen.” He means, we need to learn to periodically *stop*, take a *look* at what is really going on, and *listen* to what God may be saying within us or through others.

If you were to stop, look and listen right now, who’s in charge of your life? Who’s setting the direction for your church? What might the Holy Spirit be saying to you?

*Personal reflection in silence (5 minutes)*

## **TUESDAY**

### **SESSION 6—Spiritual Discernment**

75 Minutes

As we said earlier, we can know much of how to live by following God’s general will. But what about those decisions that are not addressed in Scripture? What does God want us to do at this particular time and in this particular place?

To try to find answers to God’s specific will for our life, for our family, for our church, and for our village is called, “seeking discernment.” We need to discern, or identify, God’s specific will and special assignments for our lives and churches.

However, discerning the will of God is not always easy.

#### **Focus**

*Small Groups* (10 minutes)

When is it difficult to discern the will of God for your life and leadership?

*Large Group* (20 minutes)

Identity and discuss key issues involved

#### **Issues in Discernment**

Issues include:

1. Personal/spiritual issues: E.g., sin, resistance, distraction, or rebellion against God’s leading.
2. Social issues: E.g., conflict with others, disruptive church members.
3. Emotional issues: E.g., we feel so overwhelmed, afraid, or upset to pray.
4. Intellectual issues: E.g., How do we distinguish our own desires from God’s will? (E.g., we may want to start a new church. Did this idea come from God or from ourselves?)
5. How do we decide what to do when there are competing opinions on God’s will or multiple good options? (E.g., in a group, different people have different ideas about what they think God wants the group to do) What do we do when our discernment of God’s will clashes with the views or policies of those in authority?
6. How do we interpret opposition, resistance, set-backs, and failure? Are they signs that we are misguided? Wrong timing? We need to try harder? We need to try somewhere else? We need to refine vision based on experience? Other? (E.g., we try to start a new program to help widows learn how to grow their own food and to sell it, but we can’t find enough money to buy seeds and some people in the village oppose the idea. Should we conclude that our plan is not God’s will, or perhaps do we need to go about it differently or be more patient?)
7. No answer from God.

## **Discernment Tools (30 minutes)**

A mature Christian leader will establish principles, guidelines and processes for discerning the will of God. To do so, we can utilize the following tools:

1. The three legged stool of the Protestant tradition in discerning the will of God for the church as new questions, issues, and needs arise over time: Scripture, Reason, and Church Tradition.
  - a. Scripture (How much weight do you give to Scripture: authority, guide, suggestive, what? When is it permissible to adopt a course of action contrary to teaching in Scripture?)
  - b. Church polity and tradition (What parameters are you setting for acceptable options based on your church affiliation?)
  - c. Reason versus Feeling (How do you capitalize on the contributions of reason and feelings? How will you handle the limitations of each? How will you seek to inform your reason and feelings with more facts and additional perspectives?)
2. A fourth leg: John Wesley added “Experience” as the fourth leg of the discernment stool. (What is your personal experience with God? What experiences with God have helped you to know God better and/or discern God’s will for you? What conclusions will you draw from your experience without over-generalizing from it? How will you challenge your interpretations of experience, when need be?)

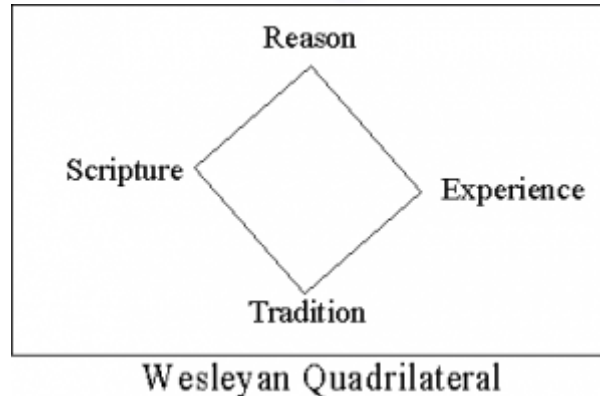
Experience is our real-life encounter of God-with-us in our ordinary, every-day life. These encounters with the divine bring us to, and keep us with God. They inform our thinking and understanding of who God is and how God works in the world (reason) and breathes life into our reading of Scripture and living out of the tradition. Experience is the Holy Spirit’s work in, with, and through us that gives life and meaning to the good news of God for the world in Jesus Christ. Experience allows the Holy Spirit to work in us to make faith vital and life-giving. It forms us into channels of God’s grace for the world. We become living witnesses for Jesus Christ in the world and follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Experience is like salt because it adds flavor to Scripture, tradition, and reason and makes them taste good. “O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him” (Psalm 34:8).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pastor Steve Manskar, “Teaching the Quadrilateral”

<http://accountablediscipleship.blogspot.com/2009/07/teaching-quadrilateral.html>



3. The Key: The Holy Spirit. A discernment process is not instead of listening and cooperating with the Holy Spirit, but is a more thoughtful way to discern a course of action that you can more confidently call, Spirit-led. The Spirit is God’s voice to speak to us through Scripture, to give us wisdom as we apply reason, and to guide leaders in establishing and re-evaluating church tradition. The Spirit can also help us know how to weight the various resources available to us for discernment, and to receive creative, timely, or fresh perspective. For Protestants, Scripture is generally the most important ingredient, while the others contribute in important ways to our understanding of God and ability to discern God’s will. (How will you seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance? How will you listen well for the voice of God? In what ways will you rely on the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, even if you don’t hear a voice or perceive any direct leading? How will you distinguish between the Holy Spirit’s prompting and your own desires, fears, ambitions, etc.?)

**Discernment normally requires a process** (15 minutes)

Discerning the will of God for yourself or church or group—and getting others to follow you—often requires a thoughtful process of some kind.

This process normally includes praying for help. We need to ask God for insight, strength and courage to make needed changes. A prayer that came to me a few years ago helps me when I sense that change is needed.

- Lord, please help me to see what I need to see,
- Give me the courage to face the truth, and
- Wisdom and strength to act on what you reveal. May your will be done.

We also need to involve others to help us to discern what is (and may not be) truly from God. In making decisions about our life, it is wise to consult with our elders, mentors, and other respect-worthy Christians. In making decisions about our leadership, we need to consult with those who will be affected by our changes.

In the church, the discernment process is more complicated. Sometimes, the Spirit-led leader must be willing to speak a message that God gives to him or her that others don’t know about at first. At other times, the Spirit-led leader needs to listen to the Spirit together with the other leaders. When all the decision-makers are gathered together, they need to pray, to discuss, and to work together to discern God’s leading. Then they need to make a plan together.

*Tools for corporate discernment.* As we mature as discerning, Spirit-led leaders, we have the responsibility to help our churches learn how to discern the will of God as a body of believers.

1. Utilize leadership teams and other leaders in the discernment process (Who is designated with special responsibility to discern God’s will for the church/group? Who is assigned to help clarify the issues? Who makes recommendations? Who makes decisions?)

The Rev. Graham Standish advises leaders to invite only those committed to serving God’s will and not their own.<sup>7</sup>

2. Create a process for group discernment. (What is your process of discernment when working with a group/leadership team or congregation? How will you handle differences of opinion? At what point will you make a decision, even if the group is not unanimous?)

Standish advises:

- Create a process of discernment
- Keep the process simple
- Be prayerful
- Ask: “What does God want?”

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<sup>7</sup> Graham Standish, *Becoming the Blessed Church* (BBC), pp. 61, 63f.

3. Create a culture of discernment. (What will you do to create an environment in which seeking God’s will through prayerful discernment is part of the culture of your church or organization—language, practices, mindset, and so forth?)<sup>8</sup>

We will talk more about how to work effectively with others when we talk about Listening Well.

### **Case Study: Acts 15**

The church had to wrestle with the very challenging issue of how to honor scripture and tradition that set up very specific requirements for the Jewish people and to acknowledge how God was at work among the Gentiles. Scripture alone could not solve this issue. They need to use their minds, too, believing that the Holy Spirit was active not only in Scripture and revelation (e.g., in Paul’s calling to the Gentiles), but also in the process of discussion and debate.

Jack Levison: “According to the story of the Jerusalem Council, then, the holy spirit inspires community by means, rather than apart from, the rigors of the mind, the sustained and scrupulous examination of an important issue that expresses—and determines—the character of the church.... At this decisive moment, this critical transition, James connects the work of the holy spirit with the experience of believers, intense argument and deliberation, and scripture” (*Inspired*, p. 115)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 67, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013), p. 115.

## **SESSION 7—Spirit-Led Leadership**

75 Minutes

### **Focus**

*Small Groups* (10-15 minutes)

What does it mean to you to be a Spirit-led pastor or leader?

*Large Group Discussion* (10 minutes)

### **Transition** (5 minutes)

“Spirit-Led Leaders seek to...”

1. know and love God deeply in a personal way
2. follow Jesus Christ faithfully and wholeheartedly
3. live and lead by the power, love and self-discipline that comes from the Holy Spirit
4. draw others into Spirit-led living and Spirit-led leading in ways that build up the whole body of Christ

In this session, we are going to talk about the biblical basis for Spirit-led leadership. In the next session, we will focus on some specific actions you can take to become a better Spirit-led leader.

### **Teaching**

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 5** Create a vital spiritual environment within your workplace.

**Soul Principle 5** God works powerfully as we seek the Spirit’s activity among us.

### **Biblical Perspectives**

According to New Testament teaching, the **key** to creating a vital spiritual work environment **is to actively draw on God’s Spirit within ourselves and other team members**. In this session, we’re going to look at several key biblical passages to come up with a list of characteristics of Spirit-led leadership.

*1 Corinthians 12:1-7*

Q. What do these verses suggest about spiritual leadership? What does a Spirit-led leader need to keep in mind or to do?

1. The Holy Spirit has “gifted” various members of the congregation to serve in ways that serve the common good. Because of the Holy Spirit’s gifts, we can expect God to work through each member of our church to serve Christ’s purposes.
2. Each member is needed. Paul likens the church to a body, made of different members, each of which is needed. If we don’t draw fully on every member, we make our church weaker. (See 1 Cor. 12:12-25).
3. Pastors serve the congregation by helping members identify, cultivate, value and use their gifts for the sake of others.

When the apostle Paul counseled churches on their relationships, their common mission, and their ministry to one another, he emphasized the role of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Each member of the group possesses one or more spiritual gifts to be used to benefit the entire body.

This calls for creating a certain kind of church or work environment. Spirit-led leaders appreciate the various gifts of the Holy Spirit as they appear in others. They use these gifts as much as possible. And all members of the team are valued because of the Holy Spirit’s activity in their lives.

*Galatians 5:16-25* (Note: we read these verses yesterday.)

Q. What do these verses suggest about spiritual leadership? What does a Spirit-led leader need to keep in mind or to do?

1. The Spirit’s leading will be in stark contrast to the impulses of the “flesh”.
2. The congregation needs to be taught how to recognize and follow the Spirit’s leading.
3. The Spirit-led leader must live by the Spirit, too.
4. Only the Holy Spirit can help us to overcome sinful impulses.
5. These verses give a leader a guide in order to know if he or she is led by the Holy Spirit or by the flesh.

Paul assumes that the Christians to whom he writes have experienced spiritual transformation in their personal lives, and he counsels them to govern their dealings with others accordingly. For example, he urged the Galatian Christians to live lives that flowed from the Holy Spirit within them: (Read Galatians 5:16-25 again.)

*Ephesians 4:30-5:2*

Q. What do these verses suggest about spiritual leadership? What does a Spirit-led leader need to keep in mind or to do?

1. I, as a leader, must first live by the Spirit in my own relationships with others.
2. We were called to live by love—to show love and forgiveness to others as we have experienced from God.
3. God is the source of love, Christ is the model, and the Holy Spirit is the source of our power to live in love.
4. Spirit-led leaders need to teach appropriate behavior for followers of Jesus Christ (not to give Christians a law, but to explain clearly what godly living means).

Here in Ephesians, Paul urges the believers to base the way they relate to others around them on what they themselves have experienced from God. The love and forgiveness they have received, along with the Holy Spirit, should be the basis for their relationships.

*Philippians 2:1-8*

1. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit should have a significant impact on our relationships with other believers.
2. As leaders, we are called to imitate Christ’s loving, servant-like posture in our leadership, and to make unselfishness and service values for the whole church.

Our relationship with Christ can also provide the basis for unselfishness and servant leadership. Paul urged the Philippians to function constructively with one another in ways that grew out of their own spiritual experience with God and Christ’s example.

*Biblical Precedent for Spirit-Led Leadership*

*Acts 6:1-7*

Q. What does this story suggest to you about spiritual leadership? What does a Spirit-led leader need to keep in mind or to do? [Add to list under “Spirit-Led Leadership”]

1. Attend to the needs of your congregation by strategic planning, not by trying to do everything yourself.
2. Do the most important things you need to do that fit with your spiritual gifts (leading, preaching, praying, teaching). Recruit volunteers to take care of other needs. There are different roles for different people, depending on community needs, individual gifting. Help people to find their “fit” in the service of the church.
3. Seek the right kind of workers for every job possible. (Implication: cultivate such individuals for future needs of congregation.)
  - 1). Spirit-filled
  - 2). Wise
  - 3). Full of faith
  - 4). Respected (chosen) by others
  - 5). Willing to serve

Ministries grow as godly leaders pay attention to administrative responsibilities from a deeply spiritual perspective: the Apostles invited the whole congregation to choose people who were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” to take over a particular ministry; second, they devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word together.

Q. How many of you are responsible for selecting or appointing leaders in your church?

*Exercise on appointing leaders*

Think about all the leaders or volunteers you have appointed in the past year or two. Write down or think about each name. Give each one a score, 0-5, based on how many of the five characteristics listed above that they possess.

What insights or conclusions can you draw from doing this exercise?

(Point: Are you choosing the right leaders for the right reasons? How could you do a better job at selecting leaders?)

*Acts 13:1-3*

Q. What does this story suggest to you about spiritual leadership? What does a Spirit-led leader need to keep in mind or to do? [Add to list under “Spirit-Led Leadership”]

1. Seek discernment in the context of worship.
2. Include fasting and prayer as a spiritual discipline.

Corporate discernment grew out of worship at times in the Early Church. Corporate commissioning of ministry and missionaries included spiritual disciplines and practices of prayer, fasting and laying on of hands.

**SESSION 8—Spiritual Practicum: *Lectio Divina***

**Lectio Divina  
Ignatius of Loyola**

**Mark 10:46-52**

30 Minutes

Begin with a few minutes of silence and then offer a brief opening prayer.

*Reading# 1* Listen for whatever “jumps out” from the reading.

After the first reading, go around the circle and share the word(s) or phrase that struck you.

*Reading# 2* Imagine you are in the scene.

Become one of the characters (For example, Bartimaeus, crowd, disciples, observers.)

Notice what you see, feel, hear, smell, think.

After the second reading, go around the circle and share what struck you in this reading.

*Reading# 3* Listen for whatever the Holy Spirit says to you.

How is the Holy Spirit leading you?

After the third reading, go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to say a short prayer of response to their lectio experience. Those who do not wish to pray can simply say, "May God's will be done." or "Amen" or "Pass."

20 Minutes

Silence. Quiet meditation, prayer, and openness.

10 Minutes

Discuss experience, questions, impressions.

## **SESSIONS 9-10—Practical Tools for Spirit-Led Leadership**

75 Minutes

### **10 Practical Tools for Spirit-Led Leadership**

In this session, we are going to talk about ten practices designed to help others experience God’s presence and activity in every aspect of church life.

1. *Stay True to Your Purpose.* It’s the pastor’s job to keep before the people what the purpose of the Christian life is and the purpose of the church. Everyone who comes to the church should be clear that the purpose of the Christian life is this: we are here to know, love and serve God with all our being, to follow Jesus and become more and more like him; and to learn to live Spirit-filled and Spirit-led lives.

Churches also exist to do four major things as the body of Christ, where Jesus Christ is the head: (use diagram)

1. Provide worship opportunities for the body.
2. Educate and equip the body to grow in their knowledge of God and for works of service. (Ephesians 4:11-13)
3. Fellowship and support for one another in the body.
4. Mobilize the body in works of service and Christian mission.

In all this, we are called to love one another and use our spiritual gifts for the common good.

None of this happens well unless we abide in Christ and let God make our efforts fruitful. A Spirit-filled and Spirit-led leader lives and leads out of the power of the Holy Spirit, and calls the whole church to do the same.

2. *Encourage heartfelt and thoughtful worship of God.* Holding worship services is an important part of spiritual leadership. But it is not enough just to go through the motions, or to just have a worship service.

Effective Spirit-led leaders will think through the worship service. They will thoughtfully prepare what they want to say and do; and, at the same time, remain open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit when they are actually leading worship. They will prayerfully seek the Holy Spirit’s power and working. They will use the worship services for the good of the congregation.

- Worship services appropriately should focus on God, not ourselves. Our congregations should leave the service praising God, not us. They may be grateful for us, but the goal is to help them draw closer to God.
- Worship services are also good times to reaffirm the core spiritual values and mission of the church. Why are we here?
- They are times to express our dependence on God and our trust in God.

- They are opportunities for the congregation to praise and thank God together, to express our common devotion to Christ, and to seek the leading and working of the Holy Spirit.
- They are also times to share spiritual stories. Testimonies are a very important part of worshipping together.

3. *Love your team and congregation members actively.* One of the most powerful gifts you, as a spiritual leader, can offer, is to genuinely love your co-workers and members of your church. I’m not talking necessarily about a feeling of love, and I certainly do not mean entering an intimate relationship with them. Rather I’m talking about loving others with the pure, self-giving love of the Lord. We are called to model agape love: respect, kindness, humility, and service to one another (1 Corinthians 13).

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 NRSV

3 modes of love:

1. Heart-felt love: how can I feel genuine compassion and concern for them? (Ask God to put his compassion in your heart.)
2. Thoughtful love: what’s truly in their best interest and in the best interest of the whole church? (Ask God to help you to see what’s best for the other person and the church.)
3. Active love: what action can I take that is most consistent with love? (Ask God to show you what you could do concretely for the other person that he or she might receive as a loving action.)

As examples: You can show respect; be gracious; be caring; be humble; be genuinely interested in their well-being. Forgive when necessary and be hopeful about their future (even if you are discussing their termination from working in your organization). Listen to what they are saying and help them think and pray through what they are experiencing. If appropriate, be ready to reassure, back off, or soften your tone if you see signs of discomfort, anxiety, or intimidation. Look for God’s activity in your work together, and not just in the outcomes. Help them to celebrate and flow better with God’s movement in their life and work. Mentor them. Support them. Encourage them in whatever ways you can do so genuinely.

EXERCISE: UP TO THIS POINT, WE HAVE BEEN USING ANALYTICAL SKILLS TO CONSIDER HOW WE MIGHT LOVE OTHERS BETTER. NOW, WE ARE GOING TO DO AN EXERCISE THAT IS MORE SPIRITUALLY

ORIENTED, BECAUSE IT IS NOT BASED ON YOUR THOUGHTS OR FEELINGS, BUT ON THE HOLY SPIRIT. CLOSE YOUR EYES. PICTURE SOMEONE WHO IS HARD FOR YOU TO LOVE IN THE CHURCH, THE VILLAGE, YOUR ORGANIZATION, OR YOUR FAMILY. ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SHOW YOU HOW YOU COULD LOVE THAT PERSON BETTER—FROM YOUR HEART, IN YOUR MIND, AND/OR IN ACTION.

For Personal Reflection: What are some needed ways by which I could better show love to others in my church or organization, in practical terms?

#### *4. Read Scripture and Pray Together.*

- Maintain a personal discipline of Bible study and prayer. For personal Bible Study, consider using the 3 step process I often use:

- 1) **Text.** Read for mastery of content: write out a paraphrase.
- 2) **Commentary.** Comment from the perspective of a teacher or preacher.
- 3) **TCG.** Read for personal application

- Reading the Bible together with your leadership team and volunteers can be a very helpful and powerful way to listen to God together. The narratives of Scripture offer powerful stories and illustrations that help shape the community’s self-understanding and can be inspiring reference points for theological discussion and practical Christian living alike.

Studying the Bible as a team: I initiated Bible Study for Ministry (BSFM) at Family Hope Services. Direct-service staff and I met together biweekly throughout the school year. At first I led Bible studies, emphasizing how the text we read could apply to the life of a Christian minister and ministry. We also spent sessions studying topics relevant to our work, such as promoting spiritual growth among teenagers, and tough theological questions that affect how staff people think about and relate to God. The vehicle for building up staff continues today.

- Pray on all occasions for everything possible and appropriate. Spirit-led leaders must pray with individuals, groups, and other leaders on a regular basis. When you are working with a leadership team, call the team to be open to whatever God might want to reveal to you. Pray for wisdom and leading. Pray for grace to work through conflicts with others. Pray to draw the group together by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for the group to be able to be filled and led by the Spirit.

- Do not preach in your prayers. Save preaching for preaching. Save teaching for teaching. Save counseling for counseling. Prayer is about connecting to God from your heart and with your head, and about bringing people to the throne of grace and interceding for them. If you are going to lead others in prayer, remember whom you are talking to. It’s your Heavenly Father, your loving Lord, your Creator and Redeemer.

[Remember ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication as the main purposes of prayer. Note: there are imprecatory prayers and prayers of lament, too.]

5. *Practice the presence of God in administrative meetings.*<sup>10</sup>

Make a special effort to look to God and to notice what God is doing in the context of meetings and group work. You may be accustomed to focusing on the stated agenda—normally a good thing—but God may be doing something you hadn't planned. In every meeting, the most important agenda items are the ones God adds!

- Look for the moving of God's Spirit. Meetings should not be power plays where we force our will on everyone else.
- Invite others to be alert to how God may be communicating as you discuss issues, make plans, and converse with one another. (Mahn Joseph: light a candle representing the Holy Spirit's presence; leave an empty chair symbolizing Christ's presence.)
- Pray, "Lord, help me to see what I need to see in the course of this meeting." For example, sometimes I need help to realize that I am not listening, or that an individual is not open to a new proposal, or that we seem to be at an impasse, or that while everyone is agreeing, no one is enthusiastic. Often, until I gain insight into an issue or recognize a negative dynamic in the group, I cannot lead effectively.
- Enter into the process both as a participant and as a genuine listener. Instead of trying to manipulate the outcome, seek to remain open to whatever wisdom or leading that may emerge in the course of the discussion. Put an issue clearly on the table but approach the discussion in a way that genuinely invites the full participation of others.
- Ask others to expect that God will guide us together through the process.
- At the conclusion of a meeting, ask the participants to reflect on their experience in the meeting. Where did things seem to come together? Where did they sense God's Spirit at work. Do you reach consensus? Was it a good

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<sup>10</sup> See Bruce G. and Katherine G. Epperly, *Tending to the Holy: The Practice of the Presence of God in Ministry* (Herndon, VA, The Alban Institute, 2009) for an excellent book on the attitudes and practices necessary for leading with sensitivity to the Holy Spirit in ministry. They stress that "every act of ministry...reflects the pastor's spiritual life" (loc. 1135). 5 chapters:

1. Wonder, Love, and Praise: Preaching, Teaching, and Worship as Spiritual Formation
2. It's a Gift to be Simple: The Gentle Art of Spiritual Guidance
3. Pastoral Care as Healing Presence
4. Contemplative Leadership and Administration: Discovering God in the Details
5. Prophetic Hospitality

feeling? Was a conflict suddenly resolved? Was there love? Was new insight experienced?

Illustration: Once, when consulting with two organizations that were trying to develop a better working relationship, we started the meeting in silence, listening to whatever the Holy Spirit might want to say to us. I invited others to pray aloud, after we had spent some time praying individually. Then, before starting our agenda, I asked them to share with each other what they thought about and sensed during the time of prayer. Many powerful testimonies were shared: some confessed sin, some had new hope, some had greater clarity about their purpose to serve the community. Everywhere I looked, I saw wet eyes. The Spirit had moved. Because we took time to pray, to listen, and to share with one another, the tone of the whole meeting changed, and we had a very productive session.

#### *6. Hold days of prayer and fasting.*

Days of prayer and fasting can be powerful ways for a congregation to humbly seek God together. In my experience, God always seems to speak in meaningful ways to those who participate.

Here are some examples of how I’ve seen God work through a day of prayer and fasting.

- The day can pull people together.
- The day gives a special opportunity for extra prayer and meditation that helped to renew those who participated.
- Sometimes something important becomes clear to everyone, such as the need to do more outreach.
- Sometimes an issue that needs to be addressed will be revealed, such as how church members are getting along with each other.
- Sometimes new insight will be given, such as a solution to a problem.
- I’ve experienced God’s strengthening our commitment to our mission.
- One time, God led someone to make a very significant financial gift to our ministry.

*7. Hold leadership retreats.* Retreats for staff members or other church/organizational leaders provide an excellent way to encourage, nurture, and refresh individuals who have been working hard all year and who may be feeling drained. Retreats provide a good opportunity to read scripture together, pray, listen to one another, and enjoy each other’s company. Extended time away together fosters a strong team spirit, helps the team focus better on their common mission and purpose, and can make working together easier. The key, though, is to ground the experience in spiritual activity that focuses on God, encourages faith, and promotes consciously connecting to God. In addition to these general purposes, retreats could focus on one of the following.

- Strategic planning (the goals include envisioning the future, setting strategies, and making plans together)

- Leadership development (the goals include teaching or training to strengthen the ability of the participants to serve as leaders)
- Intercession (the goals include bringing concerns to God in an extended manner and listening to God together)
- Discernment (the main goal is to listen for “what God wants” for the church or organization; this could be combined with strategic planning or be done separately, prior to strategic planning)

8. *Encourage church members to share their spiritual stories with one another (testimonies).* Much spiritual power can be unleashed when we stop to tell our stories of how God has been at work in our life. At times when I am discouraged or having doubts about God, I find great encouragement just retelling a story about how God has worked in my life.... Be sure your stories glorify God and not yourself!

9. *Develop other spiritual leaders.* The more we draw others into spiritual leadership with us, the more spiritual growth will become a true priority of the church.

However, most people will need to be trained to be a spiritual leader. You will need to train others to listen to the Spirit’s leading along with you. Select certain individuals to join you in thinking and praying about spiritual leadership within your church or organization. Make it your goal to help them to grow spiritually. Plan to turn over significant aspects of leadership to those with the right gifts and maturity. The more we include others in spiritual leadership, the more fresh ideas will emerge. We will hear new things, and God will bring the desired vitality in surprising ways. Drawing others into leadership also makes for good succession planning.

For example, in the Bible Study for Ministry classes I used to lead, various staff members would take turns leading. They would each talk about their own relationship with God and about how they saw God at work in their ministry. Sometimes, they would lead Bible studies, and sometimes practical ministry talks.

10. *Surround yourself with others who have complementary gifts.*

Don’t be too proud to admit that you need others in the body of Christ to help the body to function well. None of us has all of the gifts. Wise Spirit-filled and Spirit-led leaders know this and make a point of surrounding themselves with those with complementary gifts.

For example, if you have the gift of administration, use it! The whole church and organization will be stronger if you will organize the ministry well. However, many pastors do not have that gift. The church still needs it, though! Paul said that God gave some to be administrative leaders (1 Corinthians 12:28). If you don’t have this gift, find the man or woman who does, and let him or her use their gift!

When we draw on the spiritual gifts of others, the whole church can benefit. In music, solos can be moving and beautiful, but four-part harmony from the lips of a full choir has even more power, and everyone can receive a great blessing.

*Concluding comments*

- To learn to be a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led leader is a lifetime pursuit, b/c we are always growing spiritually, growing as leaders, and growing in our ability to integrate our spiritual life and leadership.
- We cannot be Christ, but we can abide in Christ. As pastors and leaders, we can draw on many practical tools to help us in our role as spiritual leaders.
- By God’s grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, we have every reason to believe that we can honor God and serve Christ’s purposes in our leadership.

**For My Personal Reflection (in my own journal)**

1. Which of these spiritual tools would I like to develop more for use in my leadership?
2. What do I feel prompted to develop first?
3. How else did the Spirit speak to me through this session?

### **Supplemental Information**

#### **Embrace Change as Something Good (a Friend)**

##### **To Change or Not to Change?**

Business consultant Robert Quinn, who’s taught at Harvard Business School, wrote an excellent book, entitled, *Deep Change. Discovering the Leader Within* (1996). He explains that most of us resist change. However, we often do not realize that to not change can hold serious consequences. In his research, the result of not changing when we need to change is always the same: “slow death”. We will start to die on the inside, our position of influence may deteriorate, and we may fail as leaders.

##### *What’s at Risk*

If we don’t make needed changes in our personal life, our relationships, our church or leadership...

- We may lose our energy and heart for whatever we’re doing.
- We may kill our vision.
- We may lose the respect of others.
- We may discourage others.
- We may even hurt others spiritually.

Can you think of a time when you didn’t make a change you knew you needed to make, either in your personal life or leadership? What was the result? (Slow death? Fast death? What?)

##### *What’s to Gain?*

On the other hand, when we see change as a way to fulfill God’s purpose for our life and leadership, the result can be very different.

- Change becomes our friend, i.e., something good.
- We will have more power and strength from the Holy Spirit.
- Some people will oppose us, but others will respect us more, and will be more likely to follow.
- At those times when others do not understand, we may feel afraid or weary; but we will know we are doing the right thing.
- In the end, we will be far more effective as leaders.

Have you had any of these experiences? (Improvement? New energy? Strength, confidence, what?)

*The Importance of Change for Leaders and Leadership*

Most of us have goals, dreams and visions for ourselves and for our leadership. What we sometimes forget is that to get from point A to point B, from where we are to where we would like to be, there will be a need for change, and sometimes drastic change.

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 6** Make change a personal priority.  
**Soul Principle 6** Change is our calling.

**Two Kinds of Change—Incremental and Deep Change**

In daily practice, the opportunities to change the way we think and the way we act are limitless. So let’s talk about change and changing for a little while.

*Incremental Change*

Incremental changes are small changes that improve our life or our leadership or our church. Here are some examples:

- Suppose you had trouble getting up in the morning. A small change would be to ask someone to help you to get up on time.
- Suppose you want to improve the music in your worship service, so you add more singers or musical instruments.
- Suppose you were feeling as if there was too much for you to do with some responsibility you have. You might start delegating responsibility to others, or simply look for more volunteers to help out.

There are many little issues in our life and leadership that can be solved by making little changes. These are called incremental changes. At other times, there are major issues that may require major changes.

*Deep Change*

Deep change means making a major shift in our thinking, relationships, and/or leadership. The costs are usually much higher than when making incremental changes. The rewards are also much higher. Here are some personal examples:

- I tend to take a lot of pride in my work and my achievements. A deep change for me was to accept that sometimes I can serve God better when I am weak, rather than when I am strong. Instead of trying to convince everyone how great I was, I began to share how much I struggled and had failed at times in my life—and how God has used my failures to teach me and help others. This was a major shift in my thinking.
- In my leadership, I used to like to make decisions and tell others what to do. Then, after reading books and experiencing frustration in my leadership, I realized that I needed to let others help me lead. I began listening more to others. I began inviting their comments and opinions. I humbled myself and admitted that I do not have all the answers, and I need the help of others.

- At times, a needed deep change is to accept that something is *not* going to change (in me or in my circumstances). E.g., Paul prayed three times that a thorn in his flesh would be removed, and it was not. God’s answer was: “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor. 12:9).

### *Biblical Examples*

Example of Medium-deep change: Acts 6:1-6. This is the story of the apostles turning over the ministry of waiting on tables to seven men “full of wisdom and the Spirit.” What might have been the “deep change” in the Jerusalem church? (The Apostles had to accept that they could not meet all of the needs of the people themselves. They had to delegate some responsibilities to others so that they could focus on their priorities—teaching and prayer.)

Example of Deep change: Acts 9. Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. How is this an example of deep change? (His beliefs and work were radically transformed. He had to give up his ideas about what it meant to serve God faithfully. He submitted his life to Jesus Christ as his Lord. He went from persecuting the Church to serving her.) Note: God is really the one who produced this deep change in Paul. Paul’s job was to cooperate with what God was doing in his life.

### **Biblical Perspectives**

*God’s Use of Change for Our Good*—Romans 5:1-6, 8 (cf. 1 Peter 1; James 1)

Read Romans 5:1-8

These verses say a lot about God’s activity in our lives.

- When God works in our life, we move from despair or feeling lost or empty, to peace. God changes our hearts and minds to move us from ignorance or disbelief to faith in Jesus Christ.
- God uses our circumstances to help us to change and fulfill our purpose in life. God works through our suffering and trials to create within us perseverance, character, and hope. God pours out God’s love into our hearts, and our lives change.
- God reached out to us in love through Christ, before we even thought about changing. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” So, God doesn’t wait for us to change before God loves us. Rather, God acts in love, and then helps us to change our attitudes and actions as a result.

*The Call to Ongoing Change* –Romans 12:1-2

We looked at these verses earlier this week when talking about God’s will for our lives. Now, I want to emphasize another aspect of it. Paul is indicating that change (transformation) is our calling as Christians.

- The old way: Apart from God and Christ, we view the world through self-centered eyes. We want to serve ourselves and please ourselves.
- The new way: To live with God and Jesus Christ at the center of our life (= reorientation), and seek to become more and more like Jesus (= sanctification):

1. We now have hope for eternal life.
2. We offer our lives to God as “living sacrifices” in view of his mercy.
3. We live to serve God’s purposes, not our own.

These changes don’t happen all at once. We must spend our whole lifetime embracing the changes God calls for. But it remains our calling.

**Individual Work** (10-15 minutes)

1. What changes are most needed in my life and leadership right now?
2. What are the biggest challenges facing me in making these changes?
3. What help do I need, and what can I do to find the strength, courage, and help to make the needed changes?

## **Supplemental Information**

### **Lead by Listening Well**

#### **Introduction**

To be an effective Spirit-led leader requires a lot of personal growth and effort. As has been emphasized in this course, a big part of our effectiveness depends on “who” we are as people—our faith, our attitudes, our submission to God, and our integrity. Another important part of Spirit-led leadership is “what” we do in our leadership roles. By this we mean, the leadership we offer, the ideas, the programs, and the systems we put into place. The “how” pertains to how we relate to others while we are leading and serving Christ. Here is where learning to listen well is critically important.

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 7** Lead by listening well.

**Soul Principle 7** The Holy Spirit speaks and works through every team member

#### *Explanation*

Spirit-led leaders will listen to God, they will listen carefully to the voice of wisdom in their own head and gut, AND they will learn how to listen well to others.

*Exercise: Triads* (40 minutes)

Explain exercise and answer questions (10 minutes)

Goal: to practice and develop better listening skills.

Briefly demonstrate how triad works.

**Round 1:** Designate various ones to be Speaker, Listener, and Observer.

#### Stage 1—Three minutes:

Speaker talks to the Listener about something personal, or simply addresses one or more of the following questions:

- Who in my life listens well to me? What do they do when I’m talking that encourages me to say what is on my heart and mind?
- When others do not listen well to me, how do I feel? What were the ramifications of their not listening to me?

Observer keeps time and pays attention to nonverbal communication and any dynamics that emerge between speaker and listener.

#### Stage 2—Three minutes:

Listener helps speaker process thoughts and experiences by asking clarifying questions. Listener’s role is not to introduce his or her own opinions or to pry, but to ask for further clarification of ideas and feelings that speaker has shared.

Observer keeps time and notices any dynamics that emerge during the interaction between speaker and listener.

Stage 3—Three minutes:

- In one minute, Speaker reflects on the following: “How did I feel when I was speaking? How did the Listener facilitate my speaking?”
- In two minutes, Observer shares what he or she has seen, heard, thought, wondered about, or felt while observing speaker and listener. When did the Listener show good listening skills? When could the Listener have listened better? What significant nonverbal gestures did you notice on the part of the Listener or Speaker?

**Rounds 2 and 3:** Switch roles and repeat the process until each person has had the opportunity to play each role.

*Group Discussion on Experience (5-10 minutes)*

When doing this exercise, what struck you as significant?

- As speaker . . .
- As listener . . .
- As observer . . .

*Helpful Listening Skills*

1. Create a suitable setting/atmosphere for talking and listening.
2. Clarify purpose of the conversation at the beginning, or whenever it becomes unclear what the speaker wants from you as the listener.
3. Make yourself comfortable. Relax and be yourself.
4. Put phone away. Be sure ringer is off.
5. Nod to encourage speaker to keep talking.
6. Maintain good eye contact (unless it makes the other person uncomfortable).
7. Be attentive.
8. Ask relevant clarifying questions.
9. Show genuine interest. Ask questions that show interest and motivate the speaker to go into more details.
10. Use reflective listening skills. (Mirror back the exact words, or paraphrase, to check out whether you have heard correctly and to provide reassurance to the speaker that you are listening well.)
11. Modulate your voice.
12. Do not give unsolicited advice. (Ask first.)
13. Mentally take note of important points.
14. Help speaker identify salient points in his/her story, if necessary.
15. Be supportive of the speaker as a person in need, but do not feel as if you must agree with his/her point of view.
16. Don’t let yourself get distracted, or show boredom.

### *Why Listen?*

Robert Quinn, in *Deep Change*, argues that when leaders become listeners they can hear the inner voice of others and the organization. By listening deeply leaders can take into account what is real in the knowledge and experience of their co-workers.

“Perception is reality.” A common saying in organizations is “perception is reality.” This means that people act on what they believe to be true.

What do you see in this photo? (Allow time for multiple answers. Ask, which interpretation is true? It’s all in the eye of the beholder!)

### Examples:

- If someone thinks you are wise, they may seek your counsel.
- If they think you are untrustworthy, they won’t trust you.
- If they think the church doesn’t care, they won’t participate.
- If they think the leaders are dishonest, they won’t give much money.

Practically speaking, it doesn’t matter much what the truth is. What people believe is what will be the “reality” in your church. This is one reason it is so important to listen to what others are thinking, believing and feeling. You don’t have to agree with what you hear, but you need to know what is “true” to others. Listening to others’ perceptions is the only way you are going to know what is “real” for them. Then once you know what others think is true, then you can have a worthwhile conversation about what you and they would like to be different.

### Good Things Happen When We Listen Well

There are other reasons to listen to others, too.

Taking the time to truly listen to others requires that you genuinely try to understand their point of view and the merits of their point of view. It also helps if we communicate back to others that we have heard them and are genuinely taking into account their views. When we listen well in this way, at least five good things will happen:

1. You and the church or organization will benefit from the wisdom of the team. Sometimes, the wisdom of the group is greater than the wisdom of an individual.
2. Team members will feel heard and respected, and be much more likely to own the final plan. There will probably be less resistance to our leadership. We will avoid unnecessary failure.
3. When you listen well, you teach others how to listen better themselves.
4. This in turn, helps make your congregation more respectful of one another.
5. Over time, others will respect and trust you more. Then, as they become good listeners themselves, their respect and trust for one another will increase.

*The Alternative—Trying to Force Our Will on Others*

- We try to force our own ideas, dreams, preoccupations, personal ambitions and goals, in order to convince everyone else to think and act our way.
- But what happens when we do try to force our views? Often, trying to force our will on others will not produce the results we truly want.
  1. Trying to force your will may result in resistance to your leadership.
  2. They may argue with you or fight with you.
  3. They may subtly or not so subtly undermine the new initiatives. They may subconsciously or consciously subvert its success to justify their opinion that it was a bad idea, or any number of other things that undermine your intention and will.
  4. They may ignore whatever was decided.
  5. They may talk behind your back about how the new idea is stupid or won't work.
  6. They may deliberately do the opposite.

*Listening Skills*

- Listen with an open mind. Set aside everything you think you know or think the speaker knows, and everything you want. Be willing to truly listen with fresh ears to others and be genuinely open to be changed by what you hear. Then, stay focused on what the other person is saying, and not on what you want to say next. Your goal is to understand that person's point of view and its merits. Stay open to be moved or to be persuaded by whatever truth he or she expresses.

- Then, in addition to keeping an open mind, Professor Deborah Hunsinger, from Princeton Theological Seminary, writes that there are three skills to master if we are going to be good listeners. She has pastoral counselors in mind, but her wisdom applies to leaders as well.<sup>11</sup>

1. First, effective listeners need to learn how to accurately paraphrase what they are hearing. We'll talk more about this in a minute.
2. Second, effective listeners will ask productive questions. A productive question is one that helps others to say more about their thoughts and feelings. It also is one that helps to clarify their true meaning.
3. Third, effective listening requires doing a perception check, to be sure that we truly have heard what the other person is trying to communicate. In other words, when we're done listening, we need to feed back to the person what we think we've heard. Then we need to ask something like, "Have I understood you correctly?"

- "Reflective listening" is the name that psychologists give to the practice of helping others to know that we are truly listening. Here's how it works.

1. When someone else says something, repeat the exact words of the other person, or paraphrase what you have heard. By rephrasing, you communicate

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<sup>11</sup> See *Pray without Ceasing*, pp. 69-77.

that you have not only heard the speaker but that you understand his or her meaning.

2. When you use your own words, though, verify the accuracy of your perceptions of others’ meaning (both thoughts and feelings). Others may shut down or become frustrated if they think you don’t understand or, worse, are trying to manipulate their thinking by using different words. Thus, use a tone that communicates that you genuinely want to understand and that you want to know whether you have understood. Ask the other person to confirm that what you think you heard is indeed what he or she was trying to say.

3. To reach the deepest level of listening, catch what is being said nonverbally and what the person is choosing not to say. Learn to “read between the lines” of what people say. What do you sense from their tone of voice, choice of words, body language, and other nonverbal clues? Perhaps they are exasperated because we don’t understand. Perhaps they are frustrated with themselves because they can’t communicate what they’re truly concerned about. Perhaps they’re nervous about disagreeing with you.

#### *Statistics on Nonverbal Communication*

Psychologists have found that as much as 93% of interpersonal communication is nonverbal! One study claimed that only 7% of communication depends on words, 38% on tone of voice, 55% on facial expressions, posture, eye contact, and gestures.<sup>12</sup>

If you detect from nonverbal clues such as folded arms or a red face that the person feels angry, frustrated, or afraid, but you’re not sure which or why, seek clarification. For example, you might say, “You seem angry about this proposal.” Pause for a respectful interval, and if the person doesn’t respond, gently prompt, “Is that right? Or are you feeling something else?” Then, if you’re still not sure why the person is feeling that way, say, “Tell me more about what you are thinking.” Depending on how the conversation is going and how much information the person is giving you verbally and nonverbally, you can also tentatively offer your own perceptions: “I wonder if . . .” or “It sounds as if some part of this proposal just isn’t working for you personally. Can you help me to see this situation through your eyes?” And so on.

#### *Conflict Resolution Procedure*

##### Rules—Each party must accept the following conditions

1. Each person will have the possibility of speaking, in turn.
2. One speaks, while the other listens without interrupting.
3. Each must speak respectfully to the other.
4. Each must want to resolve the conflict and be committed to seeking a solution.

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Pray without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 74, citing a 1996 study by Albert Mehrabian.

### Procedure

1. Step 1: Person A states the problem from his/her perspective, without accusing the other person. Person B listens respectfully and attentively. When Person A is finished, Person B reiterates the position of the Person A, seeks clarification when needed, and articulates what he/she has heard until Person A is satisfied that Person B understands his or her perspective.
2. Step 2: The roles are reversed, and Person B states the problem from his/her perspective, while Person A listens, seeks clarification, and reiterates the position of Person B.
3. Step 3: Person A and Person B brainstorm possible solutions, without critiquing one another. When they have exhausted their ideas, they must choose one or more ideas that they can both agree on.
4. Before finishing, each must commit to adopting whatever action steps are needed to implement the chosen solution. If the participants are comfortable doing so, give them an opportunity to shake hands and to pray together.

### **Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Listening**

**Soul Principle 7** The Holy Spirit speaks and works through every team member.

As Christian leaders, perhaps the most important reason we listen to others is that we expect that the Holy Spirit will speak to us through others. As you know, Paul taught that Christ is the head of the body, and all the believers are the remaining parts (1 Corinthians 12). Every part is needed. Every part contributes to the common good through the leading and power of the Holy Spirit.

Not every idea or point of view of a congregation member or pastor is Spirit-led. From time to time, individuals will come forward with a “word from the Lord” that is not from God at all. Nevertheless, the body of Christ model is built upon the belief that God’s Spirit works through every member of the body.

Our job as leaders is to create and utilize processes of discernment to listen for the voice of God. If God works through the whole body of Christ, then Spirit-led leaders would be wise to listen to the other parts of the body.

#### *Practical Issues and Methods*

Learning to listen well is a good starting point for those who want to lead effectively. But there is a lot more that goes into good leadership than just reflective listening.

(Adapted from SLL book, pp. 168ff. :) The following are three essential practices for creating a good listening environment in any group, church or organization.

- Create an atmosphere of trust and safety
- Create and work a process to listen and to decide
- Respond constructively: Be careful not to overreact or react prematurely.

### **Create an atmosphere of trust and safety**

It's up to the leader to establish a standard for respectful communication. This especially applies when someone disagrees with you. Respectful communication includes the following:

1. No punishment (or backlash) for earnest opinions expressed appropriately.
2. Stay open as much as possible throughout a decision-making process. If you are not truly open to the input of others, your “listening” is a charade and lacks integrity. You prove your openness by being willing to change your viewpoints, to modify your expectations or approach, to change plans altogether, or to otherwise compromise when it is in the best interests of the goals of the organization.
3. Demonstrate that you are genuinely listening and value the input of others. Use reflective listening skills as one way to demonstrate that you have truly heard what others are saying. Encourage group members to use good listening skills with one another.
4. Maintain confidentiality.

### **Create and work a process to listen and decide.**

1. Clearly identify the problem, challenge, or need, as you see it. Invite team members to help with naming and narrowing the focus of the group's task.<sup>13</sup>
2. Clarify how a decision will be made, when, and by whom; include the scope of responsibility of the group (to do fact finding, to make recommendations, or to make a decision), and identify what individual or group has the final authority to make whatever decisions will need to be made.
3. Invite input from others; encourage discussion, including disagreement.
4. Encourage team members to consider what would benefit all of the stakeholders (those who are invested in and affected by whatever decision is being made).
5. Encourage prayer and listening for God to speak through one another. Use reflective listening skills again.
6. Work for consensus as much as possible, but do not be afraid to make a decision when it is in the best interests of the church or group to do so.
  - For example, sometimes timeliness is an issue, and action is needed.
  - At other times, the group members just don't have the wisdom or the will to come up with a good course of action. In such cases, it helps for one of the group members who is able to do so to put a working plan on

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<sup>13</sup> Alban consultant Susan Beaumont has written an excellent article that identifies six key elements of a well-defined problem. 1. State the problem objectively. 2. Keep the statement limited in scope. 3. Do not confuse symptoms of the problem with the problem itself. 4. Do not formulate the problem statement so that it includes an implied cause. 5. Do not formulate the problem statement in such a way that it includes an implied solution. 6. Make certain that your problem statement answers the "so what?" test. (Alban Weekly, Issue 420, August 13, 2012)

the table to elicit thoughts and reactions. It’s time to make a decision when it appears to the leader that no more useful input will be forthcoming or that group participation is reaching the point of diminishing returns

- (New since book was written:) Waiting for consensus a good goal in decision-making, but sometimes decisions by majority vote are perfectly acceptable. The value of seeking consensus needs to be balanced with the value of timeliness and responsiveness to needs. (E.g., sometimes a decision may be, say, only 10% better by waiting another month or two. A slight improvement in the outcome may not be worth the wait.)
  - (New) When the group is divided, discuss “interests” behind the conflicting “positions”. Be creative. Seek an Option C that incorporates as many of the various interests as possible.
6. Bring closure to the process by signaling when gathering input or discussion is finished. If you’ve done a good job on steps 2 and 3, ending the discussion should come as no surprise to anyone. Then make a clear decision that everyone understands, and implement the decision as soon as possible.

Bringing closure to the process and then acting on the decision made are important to keep faith with others. If you invite someone to participate in a decision-making group, they expect that there will be tangible results for their time and effort. If we perpetuate our “listening” too long, the process can become counterproductive, demoralizing participants and delaying needed action. Sometimes we don’t bring closure under the guise of listening, when really there is a problem with our leadership or process—e.g., sometimes we are actually taking a passive role, avoiding conflict, or becoming mired in indecision. Group processes need to have a clear goal, a workable process, full and constructive participation, and closure.

**Respond constructively: Be careful not to overreact or react prematurely.**

1. Beware of reacting verbally or nonverbally to others’ thoughts and feelings, especially if you are feeling defensive or embarrassed, or otherwise take the viewpoint personally. In other words, don’t let your emotions ruin your dialogue with someone.
2. Counterproductive reactions may include looking angry, rolling your eyes, sighing, furrowing your brows, adding an edge to your voice, raising your voice, and giving other physical indicators of displeasure.
  - Remember that you are in a position of leadership and that people will hear more than your thoughts and feelings when you communicate. They will hear what you say as “the opinion of the boss”—a fact that can make them uncomfortable about disagreeing with you or worried about upsetting you. They may also give too much weight to your opinion, and be excessively hurt by your disapproval.
  - Thus, if we value the input of others, we must be careful not to inhibit a free flow of convictions and opinions. We will destroy communication if we start rebuking, overpowering, or appearing to manipulate those who

have the courage to speak up. Remember, we want others to participate freely as long as they are on task.

3. However, if someone’s participation is clearly counterproductive or off task, you may need to redirect the conversation.
  - Sometimes others will try to sabotage a process, work out their anger or resentment of others, or in some other way reflect a relational breakdown by negative comments or behavior in a group meeting. We need wisdom and discretion in handling each situation constructively.
  - Sometimes the person needs a gentle reminder of norms for group discussion. Sometimes a sharp verbal rebuke is in order. Still other times, it is best to stop the process altogether to attend to the relational issues that are suddenly exposed for all to see.
  - At other times, we may need to be patient, because some may need time to figure out what they think and feel, especially if they are fearful. In such cases, these individuals may appear to be off task or reacting counterproductively when they are really figuring out what they want to say.

**For Personal Reflection** “How do I need to listen better as a leader? How would my leadership be stronger if I listened longer and more closely to others?”

**WEDNESDAY**

**SESSION 11—Trusting God**

75 Minutes

**Focus**

*Small Groups* (15 minutes)

Q. When it is hardest for me to trust God?

Q. How does lack of trust in God affect my life and leadership?

Q. How does trust in God help my life and leadership?

*Large Group discussion* (15 minutes)

**Transition**

Our subject in this session is trust in God. Trust can one of the most important, yet most difficult, issues for Christians and Christian leaders. It may be easy to trust in God when everything is going well, but how about when everything seems to go wrong and to collapse around you?

In this session, we’re going to talk about what we can trust God for. However, first, I’m going to ask you to listen to some more of my story for a little while. I would like you to listen for what my experience means to me and how I’ve chosen to interpret my experience.

**Tim’s Story** (15 minutes)

One day, in the mid-1990’s, I suddenly realized that I didn’t trust God as much as I once did. I had just experienced ten years of one disillusioning, disappointing, heart-wrenching experience after another. My faith had been shaken. I still worshiped and believed in Christ, but something had shifted inside me. And the changes weren’t all good.

But let me back up to the beginning of the story. Disillusionment with God and ministry began setting in about one year into my first pastorate.

In the mid-1980s, my wife and I served as pastors of a small congregation outside Chicago. During our four years there, we lost one child in a miscarriage, and my roommate from college died at the age of 28. I was working up to 70 hours a week in ministry, but I wasn’t seeing the results I had hoped for. While meaningful ministry was taking place, forces much larger than I were keeping this congregation from becoming the growing, vibrant ministry I had envisioned. I didn’t know why God didn’t seem to be helping more.

Then I got sick. On June 24, 1986, the day after my first son was born, I received frightening news. My doctor called me on the telephone. We had been doing some

testing, and now he had the results. He tried to break it to me gently. I had been diagnosed with a fatal skin disease. I had perhaps 10 good years left, he told me.

Hearing this prognosis was like being punched in the stomach. What was going on? God had not blessed our efforts at the church the way I had expected. He didn't save our daughter from death, and now it looked as though my newborn son was going to be fatherless before becoming a teenager, and my wife a widow.

Then my mother got Alzheimer's disease, which completely took her mind away. My father was forced to retire early. We watched helplessly as his health declined faster than hers. There was little we could do to help either of them. As it turned out, the stress of caring for her took my father's life in 1998, long before she eventually died in 2002.

None of this made sense to me. Both of my parents had been faithful and devoted workers at a Christian college, and yet God didn't seem to take care of them. I had worked as hard as I knew how in Christian ministry, and instead of being blessed, I was surrounded by sickness and death. I didn't realize it at the time, but I had entered into full-time Christian ministry with an implicit contract with God: I thought that if I served faithfully, Lord would take care of me.

Now, I don't know what I thought “take care of” actually meant. In retrospect, I suppose I unconsciously assumed that my family and I would be protected from harm and that God would bless me with a fruitful ministry to some undefined extent. Whatever I expected, though, I knew I wasn't getting it. All the pain, losses, disappointment, and struggles without more “to show for” my hard work and faithfulness just didn't seem right. God had failed my parents, my family, my church, and me, so I thought, and my disappointment had begun to turn to doubt and bitterness.

Then, in January 1995, I chose to attend an eight-day spiritual retreat.... We worshiped, we prayed, and we did some soul-searching.... I was looking for some guidance from God about my future. I was completely surprised by what I received.

The second night I suddenly realized that something was wrong with my relationship with God. I didn't know how long I had felt this way, but unexpectedly the truth was right before me. Though I was at the retreat still looking to God to help me, I abruptly realized that, at the core of my being, I didn't really trust God anymore. There had been too much disappointment and pain, and I blamed God. From my perspective, God had let me down.

I was at a crossroads, and I knew it. I realized that to go forward, I was going to have to decide: was I going to choose to trust God or not? I could no longer serve as a Christian leader and teacher while secretly doubting God's goodness and activity in my life. **I had seen the problem, and now I was going to have to choose:** continue to be bitter about my mother's disease and all the other losses in my life, or choose to trust that God was

somehow still active in my life for good in ways that I could not fully understand or discern.

Logically, there was a third option. I could have chosen to jettison my belief in God altogether, neither trusting that God is loving and good nor remaining bitter at a God who seemingly might not be good or care about me. However, the truth was, I did believe in God. I was sure of my salvation. Despite my doubt and bitterness, God had blessed me with increased faith and appreciation for God’s grace and for Jesus Christ. I also had experienced the love of God in ways that had brought me much comfort, joy, and peace. It would have been thoroughly dishonest for me to pretend that I no longer believed in God or for me to claim that God wasn’t loving—there was too much in my heart, mind, and experience that suggested otherwise. Yet, at the same time, it would have been just as dishonest if I did not acknowledge the huge block that was hindering my relationship with God. **The truth was, I had a trust problem.**

When all this became clear to me, I knew in an instant what I would choose. I was sick of carrying around bitterness in my heart, and I was eager to resolve the cognitive dissonance I had been experiencing. Instead of blaming God for my difficult life experiences, I could trust in the God of Jesus Christ and the writers of the Bible. This God was not a stranger to me, but someone I loved and had come to know in many meaningful ways over the years.

#### *Lessons Learned*

1. I realized that it was my expectations of God that had failed me, not God.
2. Trust is a choice in the midst of life’s painful and ambiguous circumstances. In a moment that felt like the equivalent of scales falling from my eyes, I could suddenly see what I had been blind to. I realized I could choose to trust God, and I grabbed the option—gladly.

Henri Nouwen puts it this way, “Where there is reason for gratitude, there can always be found a reason for bitterness. It is here we are faced with the freedom to make a decision. We can decide to be grateful or to be bitter” (*Life of the Beloved. Spiritual Living in a Secular World*, p. 61).

Joshua told the Israelites: “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then *choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:14-15).

3. No matter how dark it gets, or how lost I feel, I can always choose to trust God. I can also choose to believe that there is a way back to God and a way forward for my life.

**Spiritual Leadership Practice 8** Always trust God.

**Soul Principle 8** Steadfast trust in God is indispensable to spiritual vitality and leadership.

The answer to doubt and disillusionment with God is not ignoring our doubts. It is not pretending as if we do not have questions or pain in our heart. It is not trying to force ourselves and others to believe by simply preaching louder and more forcefully.

No, the answer to doubt begins by acknowledging that there are many things we do not understand about God, ourselves, and this life. Yet, we can choose to take a leap to faith (Søren Kierkegaard). We reach the end of our ability to reason our way to God, and choose to put our trust in our Creator and in God’s son, Jesus Christ, as God-incarnate, our Savior and Lord.

Then, the more you learn to live by faith, the more you can offer strong, solid, faithful leadership in every aspect of your life—at work, in service, in your marriage, in your family, with your friends and neighbors, and in your ministry.

### **Biblical Teaching for Living by Faith** (45 minutes)

Scriptures provide the theological foundation for maintaining an attitude of trust in God.

#### **1. Remember your limited ability to understand the will and ways of God.**

(Isaiah 55:8-9; Luke 24:17)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV

After Jesus’ death, two disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. When he asked them what they were discussing, “they stood still, looking sad.”

Luke 24:17 NRSV

Beware of getting “stuck” on the road of life, stopped in your tracks with downcast faces, supposing all is lost. When life’s events just don’t make sense to you and you cannot imagine how God could be a part of what is happening, remember the limitations of your ability to grasp the ways of the Lord. God may be up to something that you cannot even imagine, let alone comprehend.

**2. Expect God to be at work in your life and leadership, leading and guiding you.** (Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5-6)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.  
Proverbs 3:5-6 NIV

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.  
James 1:5-6 NRSV

Spiritually mature individuals and leaders know the tremendous value of seeking God’s leading and guidance in little and big ways, every day, in every aspect of their life. Each of us has to learn how to discern God’s activity in our life over time. Wise individuals and effective leaders also know that they often need to draw on a whole host of resources, experts, and experiences to make good decisions.

We are called to submit our will to God’s will and to not to jump to conclusions based on our own understanding of circumstances. The way of faith is to seek Spirit-inspired wisdom and direction, to do the best that we can with the knowledge and resources available to us, and to trust that the Lord God will direct our paths, according to his will.

**3. Expect God to build character and faith out of your experiences of suffering.** (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28-29; 12:2; 1 Peter 1:6-9)

*Romans 5:3-5*

We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.  
Romans 5:3-5 NIV

Some Christians become bitter when they go through tragedy, such as the loss of a child, a horrible accident, or a brutal crime. They may feel abandoned. They can’t imagine a good God allowing such a thing, and certainly can’t see any good in it. The first thing to remember in such circumstances is that just because we can’t understand what’s going on doesn’t mean God isn’t at work now, just as God has been in the past. God’s actions in history (in Christ’s life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, and in many aspects of our life experience) encourage us to believe

that God will continue to work in our life for good, ultimately bringing us salvation from judgment and death.

*Romans 8:28-29*

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

Romans 8:28-29 NRSV

Paul did not say that God caused our suffering. We simply do not know when God’s hand is behind a human event. Instead, the assurance of these passages is that, regardless of what happens, all things work together for good in the Christian’s life. Regardless of the source of our trials, God is at work transforming our painful ordeals into constructive outcomes, which God defines as our becoming more and more like Christ.

Paul doesn’t say that we will always be able to discern the good at the time, or perhaps even in this life. However, as our minds become renewed and as we experience transformation, we will be increasingly able to discern that God’s will is good (Rom. 12:2).

The ultimate good Paul had in mind in Romans 8 is our becoming more and more like Christ—that and experiencing our salvation. He does not promise a long, happy, and prosperous life according to our agenda. While humans tend to focus on this life and define good only in temporal terms, God’s perspective is eternal. We tend to care about our happiness. God cares about character, an enduring relationship with him, and our bringing glory and honor to him. He wants us to have joy, too, but joy comes from fulfilling God’s will.

*1 Peter 1:6-9*

In this [hope of salvation] you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9 NIV

Peter is saying that hope with a long term perspective provides a foundation for hope and joy in the short term. Regardless of the source of any given trial, God’s purposes in our suffering include demonstrating to us and others that God has truly

created a solid faith within us (1:7). God achieves this goal through a process that often reveals our weakness before it establishes our strength.

**4. Take encouragement from opportunities to share in the sufferings of Christ.**  
(Romans 8:17; Ephesians 6:10-20)

*Romans 8:17*

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8:17 NIV

Apart from the suffering that we experience from trials and loss, sometimes suffering comes as a direct result of serving Christ. In many places in the world, Christians suffer physically for their faith. Others experience psychological and emotional suffering, too. At the very least, Christians should expect an unbelieving world to react in ways similar to the people of Jesus’ time: with disbelief, false accusation, anger, hatred, jealousy, rejection, and opposition. While painful and often stressful, sharing in the suffering of Christ has been considered a privilege by Christians in every generation.<sup>14</sup>

*Ephesians 6:10-20*

In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul teaches that Christians are in battle with forces of evil. Expect opposition, take strength from God’s word and the Holy Spirit, stand firm in your faith, and take comfort knowing that all Christians struggle against the same forces. Let us stand together, with Christ, that we may rejoice together.

**5. Cling to Jesus Christ, who promises to never let you go.** (Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:38-39;

“Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,” says the Lord.  
Hebrews 13:5 NIV

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
Romans 8:38-39 NIV

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<sup>14</sup> See, too, Frances M. Young, *Brokenness & Blessing: Towards a Biblical Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2007). Frances M. Young, retired professor of theology at the University of Birmingham, England, has written about the role of suffering in the life of believers, growing out of her own experience with a disabled son, and from her considerable academic knowledge. With the desert fathers (and mothers?), she affirms the mystery of God and the fundamental role of suffering in our spiritual development.

The Lord’s love and presence with us does not guarantee freedom from suffering and death, but he assures us that he will not abandon us, no matter what we may have to face. **Whatever painful experiences we endure are simply not the final word in our lives.** Trust means believing that, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, God is still for us, and that nothing can sever the eternal bond of love between us. God is continually acting to accomplish his good, pleasing, and perfect will, even in times that we must pass through the valley of the shadow of death on the way. “‘Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,’ says the Lord” (Heb. 13:5 NIV).

## **6. Replace anxiety with prayer.** (Philippians 4:6-7)

### *Philippians 4:6-7*

One of the biggest threats to my relationship with God is anxiety. When I feel anxious, I lose my joy and peace. I tense up. This is one reason Paul taught the Philippians to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God, that transcends all understanding, will *guard your hearts and mind* in Christ Jesus”

Practical: Let Anxiety be your teacher.

Anxiety can alert us to our need to pay attention to something in our lives. Something important is at stake. The practical pastoral question is: how can I best respond to the situation at hand?

1. Time for action?
2. Wait?
3. Let go?

We pray in times of anxiety in order to release our anxiety over we cannot control, for at least four reasons. We put our concerns into God’s hands so that...

1. we can live at peace,
2. we can use our energy for constructive purposes,
3. we can be more gentle and kind to others in the midst of whatever else we may be going through, and
4. we can listen better to whatever God may want to say to us in the midst of our crisis, which is also often an opportunity for growth or service.

### *The Spiritual Leaders the Church and World Need*


Our world needs more leaders who have experienced the transforming power of God to set them free from doubt, fear, insecurity, immorality and any other stumbling block to their faith and leadership. What does this look like?

- They have admitted their disappointment, frustration, anger, and even bitterness, but they refuse to remain stuck.
- They are seeking to let the light of faith shine on their darkest thoughts, fears, pain, and distress, so that they may consistently live and lead from a place of genuine trust in God.

- They do not let their troubles turn them inward or undermine their confidence, vitality, or ability to lead. Instead, they will choose to believe that God has not abandoned them and will look for God’s activity in the midst of their life and leadership.

I’m not talking about living in denial or in an idealized spiritual state of existence that hardly anyone could ever reach. I’m describing fallible, less-than-whole leaders—because that’s the only kind there are. I’m talking about leaders who have nonetheless faced their own demons and are learning how to walk by faith.

## Simple Faith on the Other Side of Complexity

Stages		3	4	5
	1	2		
	Trust in God Simple faith Blessed life	Lose trust Little faith Suffering Questions		Regain trust Great faith Suffering Accept unanswered questions
	Simplicity Clear	Complexity Confusing Overwhelming		Simplicity

## **SESSION 12—Personal Transformation: The Heart of Spirit-Led Leadership**

75 Minutes

**Introduction.** In this session, we are going to focus about one very important aspect of our relationship with God that is at the heart of a vital relationship with God, and thus at the heart of Spirit-led leadership as well.

**Leadership Practice 9** Open yourself fully to the love and grace of God.

**Soul Principle 9** The grace of God creates the only sure foundation for personal transformation and effective spiritual leadership.

*Tim’s Story— When I experienced grace in a way that changed my life, relationships and ministries dramatically... (15 minutes)*

Of all the things I have learned and experienced as a Christian and as a leader, the greatest learning by far has come from experiencing the immensity of God’s love and the life-changing power of God’s grace.

By the gracious provision of God, I arrived in Minneapolis with my family in 1993, just in time for a weeklong seminar on shame .... What I heard that first night has changed my life forever. The speaker talked about the prevalence of shame in our culture, and how it negatively affects our lives.

Now, first, I need to differentiate between guilt, feeling ashamed, and toxic shame. The first two feelings are normal and healthy, but the third is like poison.

### **3 different and important feelings**

- Guilt is feeling bad about something you’ve done.
- Feeling ashamed means that you are embarrassed that you have said or done something wrong.
- Toxic shame comes about when our feelings of guilt and shame become so strong that we truly believe something is wrong with us that can’t be fixed. You believe that you have not only done something bad; but that you are bad.

When toxic shame is in the soil of our lives, it produces a variety of fruit or plants.

**One is like a weed**, which we would all recognize readily: negative, self-defeating, self-destructive behavior. At core, the people whose lives “grow weeds” have a low self-image and fail to see the good that God is doing in their lives. We see the symptoms all the time society: people taking drugs, eating or drinking excessively, engaging in casual sex, even attempting suicide.

Yet, **there is another kind of plant** that grows from soil contaminated by toxic shame. This plant may actually look beautiful. It is the flower of high achievement or taking positions of power. It may even **look like a strong healthy tree**. The people who cultivate this flower work hard to prove to themselves and to others that they really are good people.

Now, achievement can be a very good thing, but not when we are driven to perform and to achieve as a desperate attempt to feel good about ourselves. At some point, we may give up out of frustration and discouragement. Or we may keep pushing and driving ourselves to exhaustion without finding the peace we seek.

The message pierced my heart. I realize that I spent many years trying to achieve—by getting academic degrees, by seeking status, by trying to look good. But as I sat in the audience, instead of thinking about my accomplishments, all I could think about were my mistakes, my sins, and my failures. I felt like a failure. I didn’t feel very valuable as a person.

In other words, I was filled with shame—shame over past sin, shame over inadequacy and missteps, shame over rejection, shame over not having a job. All my failures and shortcomings started piling up on each other in my mind....

Yet, what I learned that night is that there is a better way to live life and to view ourselves. Instead of looking to our abilities, achievements or status to feel good about ourselves, we must look to God and God’s view of us. We are loved because we are precious creations of God, not because of anything we have done or what our role or position in life is.

And, yes, sin is a problem, but God has taken care of that, too. That was the purpose of Jesus’ life and death. That’s how great God’s love for us is: “...while we still were sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8 NRSV). God loves us as one of his own and has forgiven us for all of our sins.

That night was transformative for me. I began looking at myself differently. Years later, when someone asked me, “Who are you?” My answer was simply, “I am loved.”

### **Implications for Spiritual Life and Leadership (30 minutes)**

As believers truly experience the love and grace of God, they are likely to experience the following.

#### **1. True Rest**

Matthew 11:28-30—What we most need and long for.

What many of us most need spiritually is a sense of confidence about our worth and value in God’s eyes. We need to let go of all our striving to try to prove our worth. Instead, we need to **rest in God’s love, mercy and grace**. This spiritual truth has many implications for life and leadership.

When we rest in Christ, there is no greater source of hope available to us. Our lives will always have meaning and purpose, they will always have love and nurture, and they will ultimately be secure, no matter what we may suffer along the way. We will

be rooted in who God is and what God provides through Christ, and not dependent on our own efforts.

2. More freedom to love ourselves and live without shame

Romans 8:6—“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

When we finally find our sense of well-being in God’s grace, we do not need to be embarrassed or ashamed about our life or our spiritual leadership, regardless of what others may think about us. Without shame, we are freer to love ourselves as God loves us. God delights in his children, and wants us to genuinely value ourselves as his precious creation.

Now if we feel ashamed, because we are actively involved in sin, there is only one remedy: repentance. We must stop sinning if we want to be free from shame. All of us will sin from time to time, but we must confess our sin, turn away from it (repent), receive forgiveness, and seek to follow the Holy Spirit. God’s grace and forgiveness are not instead of repentance or good works. Rather they are the foundation that enables us, through the Holy Spirit, to live life fully and do the good works God has prepared for us to do.

3. More freedom to love God from our hearts

Luke 7:47—“Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”

The more we experience the grace of God personally, the more we will love God from our hearts. The more we are in touch with the magnitude of God’s love and mercy, the more we will genuinely love God in return.

4. More freedom to love and accept others

As we experience God’s graciousness in a personal way, we will also become freer to accept others as they are and to show grace to them. If, on the other hand, we are still operating out of shame and feel that we have to perform well to feel good about ourselves, we will tend to expect other people around us—notably our spouse, children, and staff—to perform well, too. We may see them as extensions of ourselves and need them to act in a certain way so that we can feel good about ourselves. We may have no idea how much we are trying to control our spouse, our children, or our co-workers, but we are probably over-controlling if we have unresolved shame in our lives and see them as reflections of ourselves. We simply won’t escape feeling embarrassed by them if they don’t “measure up” to whatever standards we have in our head or to those standards others try to impose on us.

If, instead, we rest in God’s love and grace for our own sense of worth, we can let other people do the same. We will be set free from trying to make other people perform so that we can feel good about ourselves because of their performance. We will feel freer to accept them for who they are and to let them make their own

choices about how they are going think and act. We may not agree with or appreciate what others do at times, but our own self-worth won’t be linked to their choices; we will be freed to establish much healthier and more constructive relationships with them. = ripple effect.

**5. More freedom to lead more graciously**

Our heartfelt love of God and our freedom from guilt and shame also greatly affect our ability to serve effectively as spiritual leaders of our ministries or organizations. While many skills are needed to lead well, our own experience with grace and our ability to express that grace to others are even more important to spiritual leadership. By experiencing as well as knowing the truth of the gospel, we can become effective catalysts for creating a vital spiritual environment in our workplace.

That is, the more we have experienced grace, mercy, and acceptance from God, the more we will be prepared to offer these same gifts to others and to promote an atmosphere of grace. The more we believe with heartfelt conviction that our worth is based on God’s love and forgiveness, the more we will be ready to love and value our co-workers, constituents, and parishioners without judgment or condescension. As others experience grace from us, they will have more joy and will trust more in the goodness of God. As they see our example and experience graciousness from us, they will be more likely themselves to extend grace to others.

**6. More freedom to hold others accountable for the right reasons in the right way**  
As leaders, we need to remember that gracious leadership does not lower standards for job performance or undermine the priority of getting results. Rather, grace means affirming a person’s worth as a precious creation of God, dearly loved and redeemed through Christ, regardless of the level of his or her skills, intelligence, methods, looks, or personal mannerisms. Grace keeps us from shaming people or treating them as if they were worthless, deficient, or unimportant. Grace is about loving others as we ourselves have been loved. We hold them accountable for the right reasons—it is our responsibility as leaders to pursue the mission of the church/organization effectively and to require those who work under us to do the same.

*The Spirit is the source of our ability to experience God’s love and express this love to others. (Romans 5:5)*

**For Personal Reflection (If time)**

- How could I better accept the love and grace of God in my own life?
- How could my church/organization create a more gracious and loving environment?

**Large Group Discussion (15 minutes)**

## **SESSION 13—Spiritual Development in Steps and Stages**

75 minutes

### **Spiritual Formation in Steps—Pilgrimage and Intentionality**

#### *Introduction*

In the summer of 2006, my wife and two sons (ages 18 and 20), walked 500 miles on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Spain—the third most important pilgrimage destination since the middle ages, after Jerusalem and Rome. We followed the French route (show map) that took us over the Pyrenees Mountains and through northern Spain. Our journey took 37 days, allowing for 4 rest days along the way.

Walking 500 miles across Spain has led me to view my entire life as a spiritual pilgrimage. Now, instead of expecting God to transform me magically or of thinking that it's up to me to change myself, I realize my spiritual transformation depends on my keeping in step with the Holy Spirit on a moment-to-moment basis throughout my life.

As is true on pilgrimage, the spiritual life as a whole is an ongoing journey whose destination is God. God is the one who initiates our journey, walks alongside us, and leads us in it. Yet, how we respond to God's gracious activity in our lives at the critical junctures of daily decisions makes all the difference in the world to our experience of transformation.<sup>15</sup>

#### *One Step at a Time: A Pilgrim's Guide to Spirit-led Living*

1. Take the next step.
2. Embrace the journey.
3. Face reality.
4. Seek inner change.
5. Be led by the Holy Spirit.
6. Be prepared to cross bridges.

Spiritual pilgrimage, then, is a lifelong journey of asking questions and seeking answers, of learning how to see more clearly and to listen more carefully, of changing and being changed, and ultimately, of pursuing God and learning how to better walk with God each step along the way. No matter where we start in our faith and relationship with God, the journey for Christians is marked by seeking to know, love, and serve God better, to follow Jesus Christ, and to be filled and led by the Holy

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<sup>15</sup> For more insights into the lifelong spiritual journey for Christians, with suggestions and examples based on the author's pilgrimage across northern Spain, see Timothy C. Geoffrion, *One Step at a Time: A Pilgrim's Guide to Spirit-Led Living* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2008).

Spirit as a way of life.

However, spiritual pilgrims also know what it is like to struggle, to fail, to get off track, to be discouraged, to doubt, and to be frustrated and disappointed with God. True spiritual pilgrims are just like every other fallible human being, except they believe in God and value their relationship with God highly enough to keep pursuing God. They want to grow spiritually, and when they lose their way, they grow dissatisfied with their life and look to God for guidance and help to get back on track.

### **Stages of Spiritual Development**

Just as spiritual development is a matter of series of steps that we take over our lifetime, it is also a matter of passing through various stages.

The classic text on spiritual formation was written by James Fowler.<sup>16</sup> We are not going to take time to go into his intellectual and psychological approach, even though it would be a worthwhile academic study for you. Instead we are going to look briefly at another model written by individuals who worked closely with individuals within the church context.

Bob Guelich (now deceased) and Janet Hagberg offer an excellent resource that grows out of deep spiritual and psychological insight into personal growth and relating to God.<sup>17</sup> In a humble, yet profound way, they offer thoughtful, insightful and practical teaching on various stages in the Christian faith journey and on spirituality, which they define as “the way in which we live out our response to God.”

Assumption of authors: “We need all the stages of faith for full spiritual formation.... each stage is active in us and [yet].... Our “home stage” is the stage which we are residing at this time, where we spend more time and energy at this point in our lives” (p. 162).

1. The Recognition of God—this stage humbles us.
  2. The Life of Discipleship (inward focus, learning from teacher)—grounds us
  3. The Productive Life (outward focus, service, for our sake)—rewards and exalts us
  4. The Journey Inward (time of questioning; life or faith crisis; loss of certainties; search for direction; releasing God from box; apparent loss of faith)—unsettles us
- THE WALL—“unmasks us...the deep journey of healing our darkness and

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<sup>16</sup> James W. Fowler. *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development & Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000. See, too, his book, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Janet Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich. *The Critical Journey : Stages in the Life o Faith*. Salem, Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2d Edition, 2005.

uncovering God's will" = "our will facing God's will" (p. 175). We finally face truth and die to self. Thus, the key to going through the wall is surrender your will to God's, and let the Spirit take you to the next stage.

5. The Journey Outward (service for God's sake; renewed sense of God's acceptance, of calling, vocation; concern and focus on others' best interests; a deep calm or stillness)—transforms us
6. The Life of Love (the life we live in God)—transcends us. Cf. Stage 3, we give up what we can afford; at stage 6, ... what we cannot afford—our whole life. (p. 182)

1	2	3
Trust in God	Lose trust	Regain trust
Simple faith	Little faith	Great faith
Blessed life	Suffering	Suffering
	Questions	Accept unanswered questions
Simplicity	Complexity	Simplicity
Clear	Confusing	
	Overwhelming	

"St. Augustine: 'On earth we are wayfarers, always on the go. This means that we have to keep moving forward. Therefore, be always unhappy about where you are if you want to reach what you are not. If you are pleased with what you are, you have stopped already. If you say, "It is enough," you are lost. Keep on walking, moving forward, trying for the goal. Don't try to stop on the way, or to go back, or to deviate from it' (Sermon, 169.18)." (p. 164)

## **SESSION 14—Vision, Mission, and Planning in Leadership**

75 Minutes

Now, in this session, we are going to turn our attention toward how to apply what we have been talking about this week in your role as leader.

You may not immediately know how the Holy Spirit is leading you, but you can start the process of discernment.

1. You can think and pray about creating a vision based on what is in your heart and mind. You can ask God to speak to you through Scripture to guide your thinking. You can ask for God to help shape and refine your visions and dreams so that you will want what God wants for your life. (Review definition of “vision.”)
2. You can clarify your mission: that is, you can identify what are your ministry priorities. If you are creating your personal mission, then you would focus on your particular gifts that you need to be using on a regular basis in order to pursue your vision. If you’re creating a mission statement for your church or ministry, then you would identify the primary activity or actions your group will be prioritizing. And third,
3. You can make a plan to pursue the vision, asking for God’s leading (and re-directing if necessary) and for help to do whatever he has called you to do.

Review Strategic Planning Diagram: Vision, Mission, Plan, Obstacles, Strategies, Help

Mission ----->----->----->----->----->----->VISION  
Plan : > > > > > > > > /// (Obstacles/challenges)  
Strategies to overcome the challenges > > >

*An example of vision today*

Emmanuel Theological Seminary, Kalaymyo (2012-22) 10 year vision.

1. To train 500 students for the Lord’s Ministry
2. To have a 3-Storey building for a boys’ hostel, kitchen, dining hall and bathroom
3. To have 5 full time teachers
4. To receive scholarships from 50 persons
5. To have quarters for the 5 teachers
6. To have computer class
7. To have 25 acres of paddy field
8. To have one “Light Truck”
9. To provide care for 50 elderly people
10. To plant 50 churches through the graduates
11. To have Children’s home
12. To have other training projects
13. To have a medical center
14. To have a publication ministry

*Nehemiah: A Case Study (Nehemiah 1:1-2:10)*

1. Vision: Walls rebuilt, gather and re-establish Israel back in Jerusalem
2. Mission: To rebuild the walls of Jerusalem
3. Plan: Pray, approach the king, gather needed resources, secure introductions, get help, travel to Jerusalem, work on construction, handle challenges, keep praying, trust in God, finish the job.
4. Note: In leadership, different tasks are needed at different phases or “times” in your leadership:
  - 1) There is a time for asking questions
  - 2) A time for grieving
  - 3) A time for prayer and fasting
  - 4) A time for confession, intercession, and supplication
  - 5) A time for taking risks (Nehemiah stayed ready for an opportunity to ask the King for help. When an opportunity came, he told the king the desires of the heart. And then, he asked for specific help—letters and supplies.)
  - 6) A time for taking action (he set out and pursued his mission)

What “time” is it in your church, institution, or organization?

*Strategic Planning Tool*

<b>Vision</b>	<b>General Plan</b>	<b>Specific Plan</b>	<b>Obstacles</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Help</b>
1.	1.1	1.1.1	1.1.1.	1.1.1.	1.1.1.
		1.1.2	1.1.2.	1.1.2.	1.1.2.
		1.1.3	1.1.3.	1.1.3.	1.1.3.
	1.2.	1.2.1	1.2.1.	1.2.1.	1.2.1.
		1.2.2	1.2.2.	1.2.2.	1.2.2.
		1.2.3	1.2.3.	1.2.3.	1.2.3.
	1.3.	1.3.1	1.3.1.	1.3.1.	1.3.1.
		1.3.2	1.3.2.	1.3.2.	1.3.2.
		1.3.3	1.3.3.	1.3.3.	1.3.3.

*Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries: A Modern Case Study*

**Vision for Faith, Hope and Love Global Ministries**

Better equipped, spiritually vitalized ministers and leaders serving Christ in strategic positions of influence throughout the world.

**Mission for Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries**

To teach, inspire, and encourage ministers and leaders, equipping them to serve Christ more effectively.

**[See separate document, “Example.”]**

**Plan to pursue the vision of Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries**

- A. General Plan for FHLGM (long term)
  - 1. Find various global sites and partners;
  - 2. Develop key relationships;
  - 3. Write books and student guides;
  - 4. Translate guides into local languages;
  - 5. Seek financing; ask for prayer support;
  - 6. Create one more websites for FHLGM and resources
  - 7. Create an e-newsletter to communicate about our work widely.
- B. Specific Plan (near term)—for example
  - 1. Send emails to five prospective partners this month.
  - 2. Attend two conferences this year to introduce myself to principals and academic deans who might be interested in our teaching ministries
  - 3. Draft idea for new book over the summer.
  - 4. Translate one of my courses in French this winter.
  - 5. Seek five new sources for funding in the next three months.
  - 6. Create a new website over the next two months
  - 7. Publish an e-newsletter once a month, starting this month.
- C. Obstacles
  - 1. Can’t think of anyone to email
  - 2. Don’t know whom to invite
  - 3. Hard to find time to work on a book
  - 4. Don’t know where to find a good translator
  - 5. Whom should I ask?
  - 6. I don’t know how to build a website.
  - 7. Publishing an e-newsletter monthly feels overwhelming.
- D. Strategies
  - 1. Talk with other mission agencies who work in countries I’m interested in serving.
  - 2. Make a list of theological schools and principals in the various countries I’m interested in; possibly visit some schools this year.
  - 3. Set aside Friday mornings each week to work on my book
  - 4. Ask the president of the French church we attend in France for suggestions.
  - 5. Make a list of all the people I know who might be interested in Christian leadership development overseas.
  - 6. Contact local churches to find out who created their website.
  - 7. Subscribe to a service that provides a template for e-newsletters, and build the e-newsletter little by little.
- E. Help
  - 1. Ask my pastor if he knows anyone who works in one of these mission agencies.
  - 2. Google research

3. Block out my calendar so that I will not be available for appointments during Friday mornings; ask my wife to support me in setting aside this time each week.
4. Call Judith (the congregation president).
5. Ask my current supporters for ideas for names of potential supporters.
6. Ask assistant to do this research.
7. Ask my wife to help with the photos.

### **Supplemental Information**

#### Spiritual Life Coaching Methodology<sup>18</sup>

This spiritual life coaching methodology is not intended to be used as a rigid, linear process, but identifies many of the important components in discerning God’s will as you prayerfully draw on all of the faculties God has given you.

Here are the ten steps:

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you each step along the way as you seek to develop God-honoring and Christ-serving visions for every aspect of your life.  
(Don’t rush past this first step. Perhaps the most important aspect of executing a thoughtful discernment process is the degree to which your mind is clear and heart is genuinely connected to the Spirit. At this stage, the primary goal of prayer is not to pray for a certain outcome or even for guidance, but to cross the threshold from autonomous, self-oriented thinking to submitting your will to God’s in the context of an actual prayer connection with God.)
2. Prayerfully reflect on Scripture and your life’s experiences. Ask yourself: “What do I already know of God’s vision for the various aspects of my life?” (Mature Christians often are quite familiar with teaching found in the Bible on relationships, values, priorities, and being a Christ follower. Using Scripture thoughtfully means taking time to read select passages on pertinent topic asking God to speak to you through the readings.)
3. Do a self-inventory. Ask yourself, “If I were to truly face reality, how do I feel about my life in all its major dimensions?” (For example, “How satisfied am I in my relationship with God and in how I am serving Christ?” You can then ask the same question about every aspect of your life that you want to focus on. The goal here is to get in touch with how you truly feel about what’s going on in your life in each of its most important dimensions. Discerning the will of God requires being well grounded in reality and knowing the self—you—that you are offering up to God.)
4. Create a vision. Know your heart’s desires. Then dream and imagine new possibilities. Think constructively. Create a specific vision for each major life area: your relationship with God, for the various aspects of your vocation; and for your key relationships. (For example, if rated your satisfaction with your relationship with God, your spouse, your children,

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<sup>18</sup> © Timothy C. Geoffrion, 2006, revised 2012. See, too, Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville, Ky., Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). Liebert identifies several components in seeking discernment, most of which are within ourselves: our memory, intuition, body, imagination, reason, and feelings; and one outside of ourselves in nature.

your work or any other important aspect of your life a “6” on a scale of 1 to 10, then what would make that relationship a “10”? Your vision can simply be whatever you would add or change from the present less than satisfying experience to make it a highly satisfying one. Again, the goal is knowing what is in your heart, naming your dreams, expressing your desires, and consciously bringing all of yourself into your interaction with God.)

5. Identify your mission, based on your vision for each area of your life. Your vision is a picture of your future reality that you are dreaming about. Your mission is the set of actions and activities you will prioritize in order to pursue your vision. (The goal is to think through what your role is day to day if you were to order your life by your vision, and to see if the actions required to bring your vision into reality fit with your giftedness, skills, and other abilities. For example, the mission we created for Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries was “to teach, inspire, and encourage Christian leaders, equipping them to serve Christ more effectively,” because our vision is “spiritual vitalized, better equipped leaders serving Christ effectively in the sphere of influence.” The mission expresses what I am going to do to help bring about what we dream and pray for.)
6. Identify your opportunities and make a concrete plan. Identify manageable “next steps” that you can take to pursue your vision and capitalize on your opportunities for each major life area. (The purpose of this step is to think through what it is going to take, specifically, to pursue your vision and calling. It belongs in the discerning process because it helps you to see if God has opened the necessary doors and if you are prepared to take the needed action to move forward. If not, then your dream may not be God’s will for you.)
7. Identify anticipated fears, obstacles, and distractions that threaten to undermine your ability to successfully pursue your vision. Then create strategies to “right-size” your fears and handle the challenges. (Many people flounder because of the resistance they meet and the size of the challenges they meet. Thoughtfulness means taking time to anticipate what you are going to have to deal with, as best you can, and decide if you are prepared—or what it will take to get prepared—to start moving forward.)
8. Ask yourself, “What help do I need to effectively pursue my vision?” Get input from others; create accountability structures; get support; ask God to open doors and provide needed resources; take action! (At this point, you are likely past discerning and really getting ready to start going forward. Thoughtfulness means that you recognize that you cannot succeed in your own strength or alone, and actively thinks through what kind of resources and support you are going to need outside of yourself in order to succeed.)
9. Ask yourself, “What else do I need to do to keep moving forward in pursuit of my vision for my life?” (Here the goal is to push yourself to

keep thinking through your ideas, desires, dreams, and visions when you might be tempted to just barge forward half-cocked.)

10. Continue praying each step along the way. Ask God to affirm, refine, and reshape your vision. Pray for God to open and close doors, or otherwise direct you as you take each step of faith in pursuit of your vision and of God’s will for your life, as best you understand it. (Prayer must never be seen as a means to get from God what you need—an idea, permission, resources, and the like—and then dispensed with as long as all is going well. A thoughtful discerning process is bathed in prayer and moves into action mode with the same commitment to staying connected to the Spirit and in close communion with Christ every step along the way.)

Observations and implications:

Often, we do not know God’s specific will for us in advance, but we can think and pray about creating a vision based on what is in our heart and mind. We can ask God to speak to us through Scripture to guide our thinking. We can ask for God to help shape and refine our visions and dreams so that we will want what God wants for our lives. We can make a plan and pursue the vision, asking for God’s leading and help to do whatever he has called us to do.

Example: My Relationship with God

Vision based on the Spirit-Led Leader Material

1. Live an integrated life.
2. Practice the presence of God.
3. Practice spiritual disciplines.
4. Align my will with God’s will.
5. Maintain a Spirit-led mindset.
6. Stay open to change as needed.
7. Listen well to God, myself, and others.
8. Always trust God.
9. Stay open to the love and grace of God.

General Plan (Action Long Term Priorities): Here is a list of seven possible actions one might plan to take in order to pursue vision above.

1. Examine my life to see where I am still too compartmentalized or being double-minded.
2. Start practicing the presence of God when I am with my family.
3. I will create a daily discipline for Scripture reading and prayer for the sake of drawing close to God and listening to his Spirit.
4. Relinquish my personal agenda in my ministry.
5. Look for signs of the Holy Spirit in my co-workers.
6. Honestly consider what changes are needed in my life.
7. Start practicing reflective listening skills with my parishioners and students.

8. Consciously choose to put my trust in God, especially when I feel doubtful or afraid.
9. Start praying that God would show me the extent of his love and grace that I may be filled with gratitude, love, peace, and joy.

More Specific Plan (Short Term Action Steps): Here is a list of seven possible action steps that correspond to the nine action priorities listed above.

1. Repent of a particular sin that is making me a double-minded person.
2. Consciously practice the presence of God when we have family dinners this week.
3. Start my day with 30 minutes for Scripture reading and prayer.
4. Ask my co-workers how they think we could all put God’s agenda ahead of our own in our leadership.
5. Pray for a different co-worker every day and ask God to show me how the Spirit is at work in that person.
6. Stop reading my email before I have my morning devotions.
7. Use reflective listening skills the next time I meet with the elders, and we are discussing their complaints.
8. Make a daily prayer list, and include the sentence, “Lord, I trust in you.”
9. Add to my daily prayer list, “Lord please help me to see how much you love me.”

## **SESSION 15—Preparing to take the next steps**

75 Minutes.

*Recap of Workshop* (5-10 minutes)

In this workshop, we have focused on what it means to experience more spiritual vitality in our lives and leadership. Specifically:

“Spirit-Led Leaders seek...”

1. to know and love God deeply in a personal way,
2. to follow Jesus Christ faithfully and wholeheartedly,
3. to live and lead by the power, love and self-discipline that comes from the Holy Spirit, and
4. to draw others into Spirit-led living and Spirit-led leading in ways that build up the whole body of Christ.

The Spirit-Led Leader: Nine Leadership Practices and Soul Principles

### **Leadership Practice 1**

Envision your leadership flowing out of a deep spiritual life.

#### **Soul Principle 1**

Fruitfulness in leadership requires the work of God in and through us (Luke 2:46-49; 4:42-43; 5:15-16; 22:42; John 15:1-13; 1 Cor. 12:4-7; Phil. 2:12-13).

### **Leadership Practice 2**

Actively cultivate your own spiritual life.

#### **Soul Principle 2**

Spiritual vitality flows from a real change of heart and mind toward God (Matt. 22:37-39; Col. 1:28-29; 3:17; Rom. 5:5; 8:13-14; 9:21; Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 5:22-26; Heb. 5:7).

### **Leadership Practice 3**

Develop specific spiritual disciplines.

#### **Soul Principle 3**

Disciplines deepen our spiritual life and empower our leadership (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

### **Leadership Practice 4**

Always seek to serve God’s purposes first.

#### **Soul Principle 4**

Aligning our will with God’s is an all-encompassing, ongoing process (Col. 1:9-10; James 1:5-7).

### **Leadership Practice 5**

Create a vital spiritual environment within your workplace.

### **Soul Principle 5**

God works powerfully as we seek his activity among us (Acts 6:1-6; 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 12:1-7; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 4:30–5:12; Phil. 2:1-8).

### **Leadership Practice 6**

Make change a personal priority.

### **Soul Principle 6**

Change is our calling (Mark 10:45; John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 3:21-24; 5:1-6; 8:5-11; 12:1-2; Phil. 1:6; 2:12; Col. 1:9-12; Titus 2:11-14).

### **Leadership Practice 7**

Lead by listening well.

### **Soul Principle 7**

The Holy Spirit speaks and works through every team member (1 Cor. 12; Phil. 2:3-8).

### **Leadership Practice 8**

Always trust God.

### **Soul Principle 8**

Steadfast trust in God is indispensable to spiritual vitality and leadership (Ps. 23; 42:5-6; 56:3-4; Prov. 3:5-6; Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 17:28; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:28-39; 12:2; John 14:1; Heb. 6:13-15, 11:1; James 1:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:6-9).

### **Leadership Practice 9**

Open yourself fully to the love and grace of God.

### **Soul Principle 9**

The grace of God creates the only sure foundation for personal transformation and dynamic spiritual leadership (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:3-6, 8-9; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 1:11-12; Heb. 4:16; 11:6; Rom. 1:16-17; 8:5-6; Phil. 3:8-12; 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

**Personal Reflection and Small Group Sharing (10-20 minutes)**

- What’s your next step spiritually?
- How will I lead differently because of this workshop?
- What is the main message I want to take back to my church, group, staff, or institution from this week?

**Final Group Sharing (10-15 minutes)**

**Closing Prayer and Benediction**

My prayer is that these Spiritual Leadership practices and corresponding soul principles, along with a profound experience of the grace of God, will help you deepen your own connection to God and make you more effective as a spiritual leader.