

Spiritual Growth Reading List (Suggested, topical reading at end of list)

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General Spiritual Growth and Disciplines

The Sacred Way Tony Jones, Zondervan *A look at spiritual disciplines, some outside of mainstream evangelicalism (why do Catholics cross themselves and what is up with relics in the Orthodox church?) from a creative and very practical manner. I highly recommend this book to help you expand the ways and means of facilitating your spiritual growth.*

Sacred Rhythms Ruth Haley Barton *A wonderful look at various spiritual disciplines. The chapter on solitude is right on target- we are fractured by our current lifestyles. The last chapter helps you think through a personal rule of life.*

The Good and Beautiful God James Bryan Smith *This is a first in a series of three books on a practical means of personal spiritual formation. This book is wonderfully foundational. It is a must read, and then buy some for others to pass along. Smith addresses the false narratives that shape our lives by looking at Jesus' narratives about God and then offers "soul-training exercises" aimed at affirming those true narratives in our lives. Extremely encouraging and practical. Read it!*

Embracing Soul Care, Stephen W. Smith, *The subtitle is "Making Space for What Matters Most." This is an extremely practical book, full of short 2-3 page chapters followed by 3 questions to help you reflect and apply the topic of the chapter. A very helpful book for taking steps in learning how to tend to your own inner life.*

The Lazarus Life, Stephen W. Smith. *Subtitled, "Spiritual transformation for ordinary people." A wonderful reflection on Jesus' raising of Lazarus. The chapter on the Lingered Jesus is extremely insightful.*

Soul Custody Stephen W. Smith

This book ties in how our soul's wellness impacts every area of our life, and vice versa. For those who feel a little stuck in delving into deeper spiritual practices or are not sure how your soul's well being impacts your career, your family, everything, this book is a great place to start. Steve's writing is practical, encouraging and prophetic. I love his terminology of the "violence" this world wreaks on our inner world.

Sacred Pathways Gary Thomas, Zondervan *Subtitled: Discover your souls path to God. This is a very helpful book that looks at the ways our unique personalities find connection with God. Some folks find deep connection while in nature, some while in deep study, some are contemplative need silence and solitude. Many of us need multiple arenas. This book describes numerous ways and provides a helpful self-assessment to confirm yours and then suggestions. This book will help insert creative and fresh means of connecting with God in your journey.*

A Hunger for God, John Piper Crossway Books, 1997 **Subtitle: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer.** *Unlike any other book you have read in the subject. This book actually caused me to look forward to fasting. It added depth and meaning to this discipline in my life and expanded my Biblical understanding on the subject.*

Shaped by the Word, M. Robert Mulholland Jr., Upper Room Books, 1985, 2000.

Mulholland offers some penetrating thoughts on surrendering to God's formational work and practical ideas on spiritual reading of the Scriptures. This can be a helpful book in your own interaction with the Word of God. It is a must read for anyone with the gift and ministry of teaching. (Chapters 4-7 are rather technical).

Chasing Daylight, Eugene O'Kelly. *Riveting! O' Kelly was a successful CEO of one of the largest accounting firms in the US. Then he was told he had 3 months to live. He quit his job and this book tells what he learned of what is important in life the last months he was alive.*

Come Be My Light Mother Teresa, *I am not sure how to describe this book. I honestly have not read anything like this outside of the Apostle Paul's writings. I have experienced little of what this woman lived. Mother Teresa is deepening my theology of suffering and concept of spirituality. She is mentoring me as I process this book. Well written. Some may find it repetitive. I found it enthralling.*

Anonymous Alicia Britt Chole, Integrity Books *A reflection on why God would become man and then spends 90% of his life in obscurity, and what God is doing with the obscure elements of our lives. What is God up to when no one sees or knows us? Short chapters, easy to read, very reflective.*

Champagne for the Soul, Mike Mason, *Mason undertook a 90-day experiment to be willfully joyful. This is what he learned in his study and experience. 90 2-3 page chapters (1 per day if you want to do the same experiment) are very insightful and reflective. Being a person who is reserved emotionally, this book schooled me. I learned I have to cut it loose a little more - I actually squelch joy in my life!*

Gift of the Red Bird Paula D'Arcy

This is D'Arcy's story from crushing loss (a tragic car accident) to a walk with God, burnout in ministry, to a truer walk with God. Easy to read, written in first person, it will invite you to ponder your own pace of life and why you do what you do (pp. 54-55).

Suffering and The Sovereignty of God Edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor

This is a collection of talks given at the 2005 Desiring God National Conference. These are deep looks at the what's and why's of suffering. This book will comfort you and challenge you at the same time. The Appendix entitled "Don't Waste Your Cancer" is worth the book alone. You could remove the word "cancer" and insert any adversity you are experiencing (divorce, unemployment, MS, etc.) and the principles will apply. God in His wisdom included suffering in the economy of our spiritual transformation.

Contemplative Spirituality (Prayer, Solitude, Contemplative & Centering Prayer, etc.)

Desiring God's Will David Benner, IVP *This short book belongs to the trilogy of titles that includes **The Gift of Being Yourself** and **Surrender to Love**. All are must-reads. Benner's succinct writing is penetrating and, if one's heart is open, revolutionary. God's will is not primarily behavioral but rather relational. Our growth comes from being in His presence, not doing all the right stuff. Read these three titles.*

Open to God David Benner

*This is Benner's latest work (fall 2010) building on his previous writings. This is essential a more in depth look at *lectio divina* as a model to guide a posture of continual prayer. This book was profoundly helpful for me in the growth of prayer in my life. If you have benefited from Benner's other books, I highly recommend this title.*

The Way of the Heart, Henri Nouwen Harper Collins Subtitle: *Desert Spirituality and the Contemporary Life. A very short book looking at the disciplines of silence, solitude and prayer.*

Can you Drink this Cup? Henri Nouwen *Reflections on Jesus' question to John and James. We are called to drink the cup God gives us to drink, and drink it to the full.*

The Only Necessary Thing Henri Nouwen Crossroad 1999 *A collection of Nouwen's thoughts on the topic of prayer taken from his many books over his lifetime. Well compiled and presented in a multiplicity of subtopics (solitude, community, etc.).*

The Reflective Life, Ken Gire, IVP, 1998 *Gire invites us to slow down enough to learn to observe God's constant presence and work around us. Important habits for people who desire to discern God's work in other's lives as well as their own.*

Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer Michael Casey, Ligouri/Triumph
Casey is a Cistercian Monk in Australia. His writing is fluid and fresh. I really enjoyed this and the next title. But again, there are things in here that I still have not personally experienced. Casey is helping to deepen my understanding and patience in walking with God. Try this quote on for size, "Prayer is strange as an activity where no success is possible (p. 24)." I am so very comforted to read a monk write that!

Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina Michael Casey, Ligouri/Triumph
Lectio Divina is Latin meaning 'sacred reading.' It is the practice of contemplative interacting with the word of God developed by Ignatius of Loyola. For those seeking to learn more about silence and solitude as well as a reflective interacting with the word of God, Casey is most helpful.

A Guide to Living the Truth: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility Micheal Casey
The book draws upon Benedict's chapter 7 in the Rule. It will be of great encouragement to you in your own journey.

A Testament of Devotion Thomas R. Kelly, Harper Collins, 1969 *A classic. A penetrating look at a life lived for God. This is a book that will give you pause on every page. Read it slowly and reflectively.*

Open Hear Open Mind Thomas Merton
In the realm of contemplative prayer, this has been one of the most practical and encouraging books I have ever read. Merton not only deals with the how to's but also extensively deals with the reality of rampant thoughts while trying to be still and quiet. He encouragingly says that it is not realistic to expect one to not have thoughts, even lots of thoughts. The issue is how you respond to them. Read this to grow in your ability to pray contemplatively and attentively to God.

The Way is Made by Walking, Arthur Paul Boers, *This is about Boers' personal pilgrimage walking the Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain. Reading about the experiences of the pilgrimage is fascinating in itself. But I found the reflections on the pilgrimage motif for ordinary life encouraging. Not the best book on this list, but if pilgrimage is something you have been thinking about, or if you want to do such a hike yourself, a very good resource. I liked the book.*

Letters from the Desert Carlo Carretto
"The purpose of life is to be transformed into divine love," writes Carretto. At the age of 44, Carretto entered the Little Brothers of Jesus in North Africa. This book comes from his personal lessons and growth from those years. This is not an easy read, but well worth it - numerous chapters are beckoning me deeper into God's heart for the poor and His love for me.

Personal Maturity (Identity, Emotional Growth)

Life of the Beloved Henri Nouwen *This book deals with our true identity, which enables us to be and do as we were made. A must read.*

The Return of the Prodigal Son, Henri Nouwen Image 1994 *A reflection upon the biblical story and the painting by Rembrandt – insightful and penetrating. I am the younger son and the older son. God invites me to grow into becoming the father.*

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Peter Scazzero, *I think Scazzero is onto the biggest issue hindering our spiritual growth – emotional immaturity. If I am emotionally immature, I cannot relate well, and isn't the spiritual life all about relating to God and others?! Some will find this book rudimentary, I think you have to read it. And then you need to give a copy to everyone on your team and every person you are investing in and start talking about it.*

Anatomy of the Soul, Curt Thompson, The author is a private practicing psychologist with a deep background in neurology. I am not sure how to describe this fascinating book: He shows how our brains function, how we get stuck in old lies and habits from our past and how spiritual practices can literally retrain our minds to respond to life differently. I found this book fascinating and profoundly liberating. I was able to see into another layer of my story and how it impacts me and how my response to it often controls me without knowing it. I strongly recommend this book if you are serious about emotional and relational maturing.

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane, Katie D'Amico. *I begin this list with a beautiful children's book. It is a story, as the dust jacket states, of love, loss and learning to love again. Wonderfully told, beautiful art work, it will mess you up. Read it first, then read it to your kids or grandkids.*

See David Benner titles above (*Gift of Being Yourself and Surrender to Love*)

Community / Trinity

Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's; *A classic and a must read. The topic is about community, but so much more. There are some all-time classic quotes in here. I'll let you find them. A short but penetrating read. Mine is so underlined and falling apart that I almost can't read it anymore.*

Experiencing the Trinity Darel Johnson, Regent College Publishing *Likely the best explanation of the mystery that is the Triune God. Wonderfully insightful, easy to read, and inviting relationally. We are invited by the Spirit to join in the communion of the Father and the Son.*

Worship, Communion, and the Triune God James Torrence

This will be a theologically stretching book for many, but I recommend it for your expansion. Torrence always has amazing insight into current trends and theological implications.

Vocation & Spiritual Depth

Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership Ruth Haley Barton. *This book is directed to leaders, but will have application to anyone in a role of influence (like parents). Barton looks at how significant times with God in Moses' life mark him and transformed his leadership. Two chapters toward the end on leadership community and group discernment are extremely unique and insightful – well worth the book. I do not recall reading on these topics anywhere else.*

In the Name of Jesus, Henri Nouwen Crossroads, 1998. *Reflections on Christian Leadership. Many who have read this book describe it as profoundly influential. I have read it a couple of times myself.*

Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity David Whyte (Riverhead Books) *In a book store you will find this book in the business section. Whyte writes in a very philosophical yet penetrating manner. He is a poet by trade (some of his poetry is outstanding – try House of Belonging). This book will have you reflecting on how you do your work, and the type of person you are while you do it. Well written. I heard Whyte speak recently. I walked away likely having just experienced the best public speaker I have ever heard in my life. I was drop-jawed. Not everyone will like this book – sometimes a tad esoteric.*

Books by Eugene Peterson – here are two titles to begin with. This brother constantly reminds me of the type of life-ministry I want to live – unhurried, with depth, purposeful, connected.

The Contemplative Pastor, Eerdmans *Addressing some of the problems of pastoral ministry and seeking a more purposeful ministry life. A great place to begin in Peterson's many writings.*

Working the Angles, Eerdmans *Reflections on prayer, Scripture and spiritual direction.*

The Pastor, *This is Peterson's Memoir. He tells his story of growing into being a pastor – his life vocation. Charming stories bring to light brilliant insights into the role of pastor others. He cuts through much of the consumeristic influences of our culture and takes us back to root principles of shepherding. All this wrapped in vignettes from throughout his life.*

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation Palmer Parker

Parker is a Quaker. Unfortunately (in my estimation) he allows new age influences to creep into an otherwise rich spiritual heritage. His writings are exceptionally insightful into the deeper truths of life (seasons, identity, formation, etc.). This is a short, easy read, but one that needs to be read slowly and reflectively. The book starts out a little weak (and flakey - New Agey) but the last three chapters are gold - he shares what he has learned from personal bouts of depression, the need to go deep in our struggles, and the truths to be learned from nature's seasons.

The Search for God and Guinness Stephen Mansfield

*O.K., this could be controversial.....This was one of the best written books I read in 2010, and the most fascinating - by far. I picked this up in our local library out of curiosity on how God and beer mix. After finishing the first chapter I had gone out and bought my own copy. This is the fascinating story of the Guinness family of Dublin, Ireland. This family demonstrated how "they saw their work as an extension of their character, as a statement of what kind of men they were" and the good wealth can do for the betterment of mankind. The founder of Guinness Beer also started the Sunday School movement in Ireland. Later generations were close personal friends with the likes of D.L. Moody and Hudson Taylor. Dublin was once the pit of the world - an impoverish hovel full of torrid disease, alcoholism, and vice of every kind. The Guinness' set out to change that by expanding business so to employ more people, educate families, pay employees beyond industry standards, building better housing for employees and provide free medical care to all employee families. They even gave each employee a paid, all-expenses-paid day off with the family to the countryside. This is truly an astounding story of how people can use their skills to succeed in business and use their wealth to further others. I cannot recommend it enough. By the way, the author (who is not a beer drinker) gives a quick rundown on how beer and Christianity are rather interwoven in history. Fascinating history (the first building the pilgrims built in the new world was a brewery - it was a means of survival! Who knew?). Regardless of where you stand on the alcohol issue, this is a great book on character, use of skill to glorify God, and how God used one family to impact nations. And it is very well written. **Highly recommend!***

Poetry

Some people do not like poetry. I find that the following books have helped me learn to see better.

Mary Oliver – *Oliver is in her 70's. She expresses faith in God, but I am not sure of her spiritual moorings. Her poetry is fabulous. It has caused me to look at creation and my own life more reflectively and thoughtfully. Two of her works I heartily recommend are (she has dozens more) Thirst (2007) and Red Bird (2008).*

David Whyte – *Irish born and raised, Whyte now lives in the Pacific Northwest US. His poetry is more symbolic and looks at elements of our identity. Having been church raised, there are many Scriptural and spiritual images. Start with House of Belonging (Many Rivers Press)*

The Poems of St. John of the Cross, *Translated by Willis Barnstone, New Direction Paperbacks. St. John of the Cross is often considered one of the great mystical poets ever out of Spain. His writings are indeed mystical and insightful. Some of the verses deeply stirred me and gave insight into my own journey.*

For Lovers of God Everywhere Roger Housden

A collection of poems from mystics across the ages. I really like this one – even if some of the submissions are a little flanky – most are wonderful.

Where Do I get Started??!!

To some of you this list may look daunting. It is hard to make a “start here” list, for I am not sure where you are on the journey. Here is, hopefully, some guidance for you. One caveat, be mindful of the author’s starting point. Many of these books are written by Catholics – true, Christ-following Catholics whom have taught me much. However, if you are not of this theological bent, you will run into statements or ideas that may be uncomfortable to you. May I encourage you to glean what nourishes you and lay the rest aside? Feed yourself, drink deeply, reflect well, sit long with Christ, and follow the Father wherever he may take you, dark though it may seem at times.

No Matter what, read these:

- Sacred Rhythms Ruth Haley Barton (and The Sacred Way Tony Jones)
- Desiring God’s Will David Benner - Then read The Gift of Being Yourself and Surrender to Love. Benner is outstanding – simple and penetrating.
- Life of the Beloved, , By Henri Nouwen. Eventually you must read The Way of the Heart, The Return of the Prodigal Son and onto anything else he has written!
- Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer' – a classic
- The Good and Beautiful God James Smith – are your images of God accurate?
- Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, Peter Scazzero – we all need to mature emotionally to love well.
- The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane, Katie Dicomillo.
- Chasing Daylight, Eugene O’Kelly – am I spending my time on what is important?

If you need **freshness in your spiritual disciplines** read Tony Jones, Gary Thomas, and Ruth Haley Barton. Stephen Smith’s titles are also most helpful.

Bringing Deeper Spirituality into Your Ministry/Work Life:

- Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership- Barton
- Eugene Peterson’s books
- In the Name of Jesus, Henri Nouwen
- Let Your Life Speak – Parker

If you are ready to go deeper into contemplative spirituality – really sink your teeth into silence and solitude:

- Open to God, David Benner
- Michael Casey’s works.
- The Reflective Life, Ken Gire
- Letters from the Desert – Carretto
- Benner’s stuff is super helpful. Barton and Jones discuss these topics as well.

Hopefully this is helpful. Any questions, or if you have a book I need to read – please email me!

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