

Living From the Inside Out:

The Necessity of Holistic Spiritual Formation for Mission in a Driven Culture

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The classic Threefold Path of the Christian journey from purgation through illumination to union bumping into the busyness of life lived in real time may lead some to conclude that spiritual formation towards Christlikeness is largely a solo pursuit for those who are able to arrange their lives around long periods of solitude and silence—preferably in a hermitage or a monastic setting. While there will always be those whose call, like that of the desert fathers and mothers¹ or like that of Benedict’s monastic communities,² pulls them from the world for the sake of the world, it cannot be that Christlikeness is only attainable by them. Jesus’ identification of His followers as being “the salt of the earth and light of the world”³ requires presence and engagement, and points to the larger mission for which Christlikeness enables helpfulness. This paper explores the necessity of cultivating the inner life in partnership with the Holy Spirit especially for those who live and work in a culture driven by ambition to busyness and frenetic activity—whether in the marketplace or in vocational ministry, where the same “hurry sickness” can affect those serving in the church.

Reflecting this challenge, and perhaps legitimizing it, is a pervasive understanding of discipleship into the way of Jesus as being optional, with salvation being largely a matter of believing the right things about Jesus and making some form of heart declaration that Jesus is Lord, albeit without a great deal of behavioral content seemingly required, thereby avoiding the punishment that is Hell and gaining Heaven upon death or when Jesus returns, whichever comes first. Dallas Willard refers to this as one of the “gospels of sin management,” the other primary one being the gospel that proposes societal change, focusing on the social aspects of Jesus’

¹ See Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, (New Directions, 1960), 4. Merton suggests that at least part of their motivation to refuge in the deserts in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries was resistance to the drive to establish a “Christian state” by political means. For them, it appears that salvation was largely individual—and the desert provided their best chance.

² Building on the foundation of the desert tradition celebrated by Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* and informed by John Cassian’s *Conferences*, Benedict provided a Rule by which to organize and expand free-standing communities. See Placid Spearrit, “Benedict” in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds. *The Study of Spirituality* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 148-156.

³ Matthew 5:13-16.

teaching to address societies many ills, but neglecting to address the individual and systemic brokenness that has produced them.⁴

In his essay, “Discipleship: For Super-Christians Only?”⁵ Willard argues against this implicit reduction of the Great Commission, suggesting that the original charge was to “make disciples,” or apprentices, by first immersing them into the reality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to do all that Jesus had taught the original twelve in both word and deed,⁶ and to whom was given the Holy Spirit as another comforter to enable and empower their transformation towards Christlikeness—the goal of a disciple.⁷ Jesus was providing both a strategy by which persons might become His disciples and the curriculum to make them so. This is, in effect, what the twelve had experienced since Jesus charged them with the invitation, “Follow me.” This reflects the invitation of rabbi to a student seeking permission to apprentice with him, the difference here being that Jesus initiates the invitation. Implicit in it is the idea of learning from the rabbi his way of life, both word and deed, in order to imitate it.⁸ The invitation to follow included the purpose or mission; playing on their former occupation, Jesus promised to make them “fishers of men.” The idea of learning their lives from Him is repeated in Matthew 11:28-30 where, having stated that the invitation He was extending was “hidden” from the wise and intelligent, but only available through relational revelation to children who embraced the reality of being “weary and heavy-laden,” He invited them to learn His way of life.⁹ In short, to learn to live their lives as

⁴ Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (HarperCollins, 1998), 35-59.

⁵ First appearing in *Christianity Today* in October, 1980, the essay was reprinted as an appendix in Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper and Row, 1988), 258-265.

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Part 13 of 34* accessed May 25, 2026, <https://conversatio.org/the-great-omission>.

⁷ This combines sending described in Matthew 28:16-20, with that of Acts 1:8, with its emphasis on the Spirit-empowered formation of those who would witness in both being and bearing.

⁸ Donald Hagner, *Matthew (volume 33A) in the Word Biblical Commentary (New Testament)*, (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 76.

⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 33A*, 324.

He would if He were they. Having experienced it themselves, this becomes what disciples of Jesus are authorized—empowered—to do as they depart from the mountain and go through the rest of their lives. And this, then, becomes the mission statement, as it were, of the church—this is what the church, the assembly of the disciples of Jesus, are to be about—making disciples who make disciples.

Discipleship is, in other words, more than believing the right things about Jesus; it involves transformation into the likeness of Christ. Willard defines this spiritual formation as “...the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”¹⁰ This transformed inner being is reflected in character and behavior such that the disciple’s foundational pursuit becomes, “What would Jesus do if He were me?”¹¹ Urban Holmes highlights the Apostle Paul’s frequent framing of this outcome beginning with the charge, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) Or again, “...we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), or “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).¹² Robert Mulholland’s definition makes clear that spiritual formation has a missional goal in that it is “... the process of being formed in the Image of Christ for the sake of others.”¹³

Because discipleship towards Christlikeness is not limited to a few select individuals but is the expected posture of all who follow Jesus, the framing focus of this paper is the necessity of the development of the inner life in a busy, driven, success-oriented culture. Intentional partnership with the Holy Spirit in institutional and individual formation is essential if the people who are the

¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (NavPress, 2002), 22.

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (Harper & Row, 1988), 5-7.

¹² Urban Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality* (Seabury Press, 1981), 18.

¹³ Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation (Expanded)*. (InterVarsity Press, 2016), 16.

Church are to be missionally present in such a culture, transforming it from the inside out, having been enabled to resist conforming to its ways. First considered will be how intentional formation in the way of Jesus might begin to address some of the challenges which are part of a society marked by its fast and frenetic pace. Then some suggestions of intentional practices that will partner with the Holy Spirit to resource the inner being of the disciples in such a society so that they are not only not conformed to it, but become agents of transformation, ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

Charles van Engen has suggested that a church can be operated by 15-20% of those who attend, leaving the majority equipped to exercise their gifts and ministry outside of the church, as the church in the world.¹⁴ This comports with Jesus' insistence that His disciples were "the salt of the earth... a city set on a hill... the light of the world," with their good works being the primary witness to the glory of God (Matthew 5:13-16 NASB).¹⁵ While there are likely some occupations that may be eliminated from consideration, the majority may be considered places to which disciples may go—and where, as they are going, they can be making disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). John does not require tax collectors to find other employment nor soldiers to resign their commission, but he does provide parameters of repentance in how they fulfill their duties. (Luke 3:12-14). Paul encourages his friends in Thessalonica apparently clocking out early in anticipation of the return of Jesus to "...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands... so that you will provide witness toward outsiders and not be in any need" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12), but needs to remind them later that if someone doesn't

¹⁴ Charles van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Baker Academic, 1991) 150-151.

¹⁵ Hagner, *Matthew*, 33A, 100. There is considerable debate among scholars as cited in Hagner as to the exact nature of the metaphor—in what sense are disciples "salt"—preservative, covenant, seasoning, etc. The specific idea is, however, framed in v16 with its focus on good works which glorify God.

work, they don't eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10)! James does not discourage the merchants from providing their service, even at profit—but reminds them to do so with full awareness of the fragility of their lives and under the covering of the will of God (James 4:13-15). The concern in each of these examples is not what is done, but that the work is done in such a way as to bear witness. Paul points in the same direction when challenging those in service to work “as to Christ, not by way of eyeservice, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ... With good will render service as to the Lord, and not to men... (Ephesians 6:5-7).” Or, again, in Colossians the overarching directive is, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus... (3:17).” C. S. Lewis was likely pointing in the same direction when encouraging excellence as an effective apologetic for faith in Jesus if the best work in fields like education, business, government and politics were consistently done by Christians.¹⁶

The ability of Jesus' disciples to be salt and light requires the salt to be salty and the light to be on the lampstand—in short, holiness enables effectiveness.¹⁷ The deeds which are seen and glorify the Father come from a character which has been transformed. This is the concern at the conclusion of the Sermon where the metaphor shifts to fruit which indicates the source, suggesting that there are ostensibly “good” deeds—prophecy, exorcisms, miracles—but which do not source from relationship with Jesus, even though done in His name, and are thus misleading (Matthew 7:15-23).¹⁸ In general, this is why attention to spiritual formation must be part of overall discipleship. There are, as well, elements of specific concern arising from being a disciple in a competitive culture driven to succeed at pace with success being measured in terms of a financial

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Christian Apologetics,” in *God in the Dock* (Eerdmans, 1998) 93.

¹⁷ Hagner, *Matthew 33A*, 100.

¹⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 33A*, 180. See also, Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Wipf & Stock, 2000), 64-65.

bottom line. The pressure to conform will be significant, and costly to witness and soul health unless mitigated by an equalizing internal pressure to transformation.

Of particular foundational concern is the way in which identity in a culture defined by hurry and busyness is shaped by doing rather than being. That we are intended to work, to produce, is woven into our origin story. The challenge is to work *from* identity rather than to work *for* identity. The narratives of Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:7-15 both teach that work is intended to flow from and be an expression of identity. It is as the Image of God that humankind is to “...fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). The man is placed in the garden created for his flourishing with instructions to tend and keep it (Genesis 2:15). In reference to the former, David J. A. Clines argues that while image may reflect some qualities or characteristics, it is primarily about delegated status as foundation for task.¹⁹ Carmen Imes writes, “The *imago Dei* is concrete. Like a statue that represents a king or a deity, so humans represent Yahweh to creation. Being God’s image is our human identity... This identity expresses itself in responsible rulership over creation, including environmental stewardship and supportive collaboration with other humans.”²⁰ Image is not, then, individual—it is communal; humankind is the image of God intended to “reflect God’s wise order into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to the Creator.”²¹ It is of more than passing interest that what follows the missional charge to rulership in Genesis 1:28, and serving as the foundation for the stewardship of Genesis 2:15, is Sabbath. More on this later. Suffice to say here that when identity as Image is damaged in Genesis 3, the rulership that flows from it is likewise damaged. The language of curse is used to describe it with case studies in failure to

¹⁹ David J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” in *Tyndale Bulletin* Vol. 19 (Tyndale House, 1968), 53-103.

²⁰ Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God’s Image* (Intervarsity Press, 2023), 42.

²¹ N. T. Wright, “Excursus on Paul’s Use of Adam,” in *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*, John H. Walton (IVP Academic, 2015), 175.

numerous to mention. At the least, "...[to] recognize that others are created as [part of] God's image should compel us to treat them with dignity. A brief survey easily demonstrates that human greed and exploitation continue to violate the beauty of our world. Wars are devastating, but they are not the only factor contributing to environmental degradation. In a hurry to profit, humans take what they want without thinking about sustainability. Earth's poorest communities suffer the most because they lack the protections of those with power."²² Without some larger sense of belonging as part of identity, ambition moves to destructive competition, leveraging real and imagined superiority to ego advantage, damaging the mutually supportive community necessary for human flourishing.²³ There is such a thing, however, as godly ambition—a deep and motivating desire for the Kingdom of God to be fully realized in all aspects of life and recognizing that, for the disciple, all of life is spiritual.²⁴

The knowing of self in God is a familiar theme in spiritual theology. John Calvin wrote "Our wisdom ... consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other."²⁵ The needful restoration of identity as found only in intimate relationship with God, which is what God is redeeming in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14), and which Jesus says is eternal life (John 17:3), calls for the intentional focus on the inner life—regardless of the drivenness of culture. Further, it enables awareness that all persons are God's children. As Howard Thurman writes, "[Whoever] knows this is able to transcend the vicissitudes of life, however terrifying and look out on the world with quiet eyes."²⁶ This will impact the nature of

²² Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God's Image*, 56.

²³ This is a core concern of Miroslav Wolf in *Ambition: How Striving To Be Better Than Others Makes Us Worse* (Brazos Press, 2025).

²⁴ John Mark Comer, *Garden City* (Zondervan, 2015), 93-111.

²⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1* (Eerdmans, 1957), 37.

²⁶ Howard Thurman, *Deep River*, (Friends United Press, 1975), 12.

relationships wherever they occur and will work to prevent the reduction of persons to objects valued for their utility. The cultivation of the inner life, hidden in God with Christ, is the primary way, perhaps the only way, to resist the siren call of facile superiority engendered by the competitive comparison of the market economy.²⁷

That utility is encouraged in a driven culture that has begun to define success primarily by the metric of the bottom-line profit. While poverty is no more spiritual than wealth,²⁸ the love of money is soul-impoverishing—the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus is clearly aware of the “deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22) and talks about it a great deal, but in only one case did He require liquidation as prelude to following Him (Matthew 19:18-22)²⁹ and apparently appreciated the financial support of disciples with wealth (Luke 8:1-3). His teaching is that the solution is not poverty but the priority of the Kingdom of God—perhaps enabling money to serve rather than be served (Matthew 6:19-33). In fact, He encourages His followers to be skillful in the use of money for Kingdom purposes, taking a page from the playbook of the clever manager but ending with the clear statement, “You cannot serve God and wealth (Luke 16:1-13).” The response is to learn to use wealth wisely “...by understanding that possession and right rule over material wealth is a spiritual service of the highest order... our response must be to develop a ministry that prepares people for that service.”³⁰

Ronald Rolheiser writes “Today, a number of historical circumstances are blindly flowing together and accidentally conspiring to produce a climate within which it is difficult not just to think about God or to pray, but simply to have any interior depth whatsoever... We are distracting

²⁷ Miraslov Wolf, *The Cost of Ambition: How Striving to Be Better Than Others Makes Us Worse (Why Ambition Is at Odds with the Christian Faith)* (Brazos, 2025), 9-12.

²⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (Harper & Row, 1988), 193f.

²⁹ “Thereby revealing the real object of his trust and worship.” Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 200.

³⁰ Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 203.

ourselves into spiritual oblivion... Pathological busyness, distraction, and restlessness are major blocks today within our spiritual lives.”³¹

The costs of living in such a culture are high as a quick snapshot suggests. A recent Cigna Healthcare study had the headline “Singaporeans more stressed than global average; 16% say their stress is ‘not manageable.’”³² Contributing factors include the cost of living, work culture leading to overwork, academic pressure, and general cultural pressure not “miss out” in tension with a “fear of risk.”³³

In the face of all this, the invitation of Jesus to take up His way of life, marked by gentleness and humility, and to learn from Him, is compelling. While the first gift we receive from Jesus when we come to Him is rest, Paul reminds us that, while it is God Who is at work to will and to work for His good pleasure, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13). He further challenges Timothy to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness... since it holds promise for the present life and for the life to come... it is for this we labor and strive, having fixed our hope on the living God.” (1 Timothy 4:7b-10). Willard uses the image of a Golden Triangle to suggest that transformation is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit but with Whom we can cooperate by the faithful acceptance of the events of ordinary life and by the diligent use of the spiritual disciplines which are practices proven over time to enable cooperation with the Holy Spirit towards transformation..³⁴ There are many excellent resources discussing spiritual disciplines and which would reward careful study and application.³⁵

³¹ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (Random House, 2014), 31.

³² Channel News Asia, *S'poreans more stressed...*, accessed May 30, 2026.

³³ Synopsized in Eric Kim, *Why Are Singaporeans So Unhappy*, accessed May 30, 2026.

³⁴ Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (Harper San Francisco, 1988), 347-364.

³⁵ Among these are Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* (IVP Academic, 1998); Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (HarperOne, 2018); Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper & Row, 1988); Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey (Expanded)* (InterVarsity, 2016); John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted:*

In consideration of the concern of this paper, discussion of a few individual and corporate practices having to do with the redeeming of time will suffice. Everyone has the same 24 hours. How they are used reflects what is valued. To that end, Paul instructs his readers to be alert, to be careful how they live, walking wisely and making the most of their time, understanding what the will of the Lord is (Ephesians 5:14-17). He appears to be working with two understandings of time—the chronological sequence of events but in which it is possible to discern the presence and the will of the Lord and thus to take advantage of every opportunity to, in the words of the King James Version, redeem time.³⁶ The disciplines which support that discernment include avoiding distractions, an ongoing filling with the Holy Spirit, personal and communal worship informed by scripture, a daily default to thanksgiving for all things, and life in community. The discussion of discipline of a daily office will gather up several of these, building on the receiving of Sabbath seeking to learn the Practice of Presence.

There is probably no practice that puts us in our place as quickly as does Sabbath, so much so that it will probably require easing into.³⁷ One day in seven in which we are to do no work—to make no contribution—to simply enjoy the provision of God. The specific manner of its observance is less important than is the fact of its observance—although practiced intention will shape time. While it is true that it is the only word (commandment) not repeated in the New Testament, that is not reason to ignore it. The gift of Sabbath is taken up into the person of Jesus who is Lord of the Sabbath, declaring to the rigid rule followers who had weaponized it, that

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People (Zondervan, 2002), 38-39; Siang-Yan Tan and Douglas Gregg, *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit* (Zondervan, 1997).

³⁶ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 42*, (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 342-343.

³⁷ There are many excellent treatments of the Sabbath including: Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951, paperback by Noonday Press, 1975); A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath* (Brazos, 2018); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* (Random House, 2000); Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017); Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Fasting* (Eerdmans, 1989); Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Upper Room, 1992).

Sabbath is for humankind, rather than humankind being for the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). While they may have needed to hear the latter part of that declaration, our generation likely needs to hear the first part.³⁸

The origin of Sabbath as part of the creation narrative sanctifying time, creating a “holiness in time,”³⁹ is of vital importance for those who would learn to redeem time. Sabbath serves to seal, to bring to completion, the work of the first account of creation and as a foundation for the second.⁴⁰ When Israel is given the words which will frame her identity as the people of God after the Exodus, the longest development is built around the first positive command to remember the Sabbath—suggesting that, even then, sabbath-keeping was challenging to a people who had been defined by work for the last 400 years (Exodus 20:8-11). Remembering is not simply recalling to mind but requires observance, keeping the holiness—it belongs to Yahweh—which it had in origin.⁴¹ The rationale for Sabbath keeping anchors it in the implicit reminder that they were created, something they had nothing to do with but which it would be well for them to remember; in a culture of earning, they began with the unearned gift of being. Sabbath ties them to the “very structure of the universe,”⁴² bringing to mind H. H. Farmer’s observation, “If you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters.”⁴³

After Israel has wandered in the wilderness for a generation, the second set of words provides a different rationale for Sabbath. Now, they are told to extend the remembering to “observe—to keep—the Sabbath by making it holy (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).” The rationale here

³⁸ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (RandomHouse: WaterBrook, 2019), 152.

³⁹ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 9.

⁴⁰ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis in Word Biblical Commentary (Old Testament) Volume 1* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 36.

⁴¹ John Durham, *Exodus in Word Biblical Commentary (Old Testament) Volume 2* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 289.

⁴² Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), 416.

⁴³ Quoted in John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 154.

reminds them that they were redeemed, delivered from slavery in Egypt—a deliverance they had nothing to do with but of which they were the beneficiaries—and worth the setting aside of day in celebration by not working.⁴⁴ To sabbath is to enter into the holiness of time. It is to rest from non-defining work, allowing work to become an expression of identity rather than its source.⁴⁵ It is to remember the gifts of creation and redemption, both of which have been received without earning. In so doing, it redeems the rest of the week, forming a new social reality that is carried back into days one through six. Sabbath will ideally include gathering for corporate worship, for the hearing of the word preached, for prayer, and for fellowship, knowing that transformation to Christlikeness will require life as part of the Body of Christ, the church. For those whose work is the providing of the Sunday services, it is likely that their Sabbath will be best observed on a different day of the week. In any case, establishing, calendaring, and observing a day set aside as Sabbath is a good foundation for discerning God’s presence throughout the rest of the week. “People who keep Sabbath live all seven days differently.”⁴⁶

Establishing a regular practice of devotion throughout the other days of the week will perpetuate the Sabbath rest Jesus gives the weary who come to Him and which they find as they learn to work from and with Him (Matthew 11:28-27). There are many good resources that speak to the value of establishing a Rule of Life that will provide a structure or framework or trellis giving order, structure, and support to the way the self is managed in time.⁴⁷ Most of them build on the Rule of St. Benedict written around 530 to provide guidance for the communal life of the

⁴⁴ Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy in Word Biblical Commentary (Old Testament) Volume 5* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 119-120.

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 10. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 43. Kindle Edition.

⁴⁷ These include: Margaret Guenther, *At Home in the World: A Rule of Life for the Rest of Us* (Seabury Books, 2006); John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way* (Waterbrook, 2024); Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality (Updated)* (Zondervan, 2014, 2017); Ken Shigematsu, *God In My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Zondervan, 2013); *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way* (IVP, 2012).

monks living in monastic community.⁴⁸ Many of the resources mentioned will be helpful in extending the following structure to cover a broader swath of life.⁴⁹ For purposes of this paper, seeking to extend the Sabbath rest into the other six days, a simpler approach is adopted. It is likely that, as the heart expands through intimacy with God, the abbreviated structure provided will likewise expand, drawn to depth by love, learning to follow Jesus in all His ways.

To begin, it may be helpful to “warm the heart” with a psalm or a written invocation, preparing for the first component of an abbreviated Daily Office which will be the intentional creation of space/place and time to meet with God—solitude and silence—without which, writes Henri Nouwen, there is no spiritual life.⁵⁰ Stepping out of defining relationships to be with God and seeking to silence the distractions of the external and internal noise in order to hear God’s voice, provide an echo of the cathedral in time that is Sabbath.⁵¹ Given that we live and move and have our being in God, this is less about God becoming present and speaking as it is about us becoming present to Him Who is always present and speaking. It is about embracing the fact of our uniqueness and with it, our utter “aloneness” in the universe; we follow Jesus into the lonely place with which He was so familiar, seeking to be fully present in it before God that it might become solitude rather than that it drift into loneliness.⁵² And in that solitude, enabled by eliminating the distracting noises in our environment, we seek to be quiet in our inner life so that we might hear God’s voice in the “sheer silence (I Kings 19:12, RSV).”⁵³

⁴⁸ There are a number of editions but one of the best is Joan Chitister, *The Rule of St. Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Crossroad Publishing, 2010).

⁴⁹ Scazzero, for example, includes Prayer, Rest, Relationships, Work; Comer includes Daily/Weekly/Monthly/Seasonal practices.

⁵⁰ This is the central theme in Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (HarperCollins, 1981).

⁵¹ Dallas Willard, *Disciplines of the Spiritual Life*, 160-165.

⁵² Henri Nouwen, from *Out of Solitude*, excerpted in Wendy Wilson Greer, ed., *The Only Necessary Thing* (Crossroad, 1999), 42-43.

⁵³ Henri Nouwen, from *Making All Things New*, excerpted in Wendy Wilson Greer, ed., *The Only Necessary Thing* (Crossroad, 1999), 82.

In the space created by solitude and silence we can read, intent on hearing a short passage of scripture. The goal of this practice is not to be *informed* by the text of scripture, as helpful as that is in other contexts, but to be *formed* by the scripture—to let it read us rather than the other way around.⁵⁴ Mulholland, and many others, suggest the Benedictine model of *lectio divina* with its slow repetitive structure allowing for time to hear the word (even if read silently, the goal is to let the word be heard in the inner being) noticing ideas or words that catch our attention; to then meditate and reflect on the word letting it roll around in our heart and mind in examen; and then to pray the word, engaging in conversation with God around what has been heard or highlighted; and finally to sit in contemplative stillness, listening to the silence for the whisper of love that is God’s voice.⁵⁵

Prayer is the overarching word describing the devotional life, but it also refers to that part of our devotion that involves intentional communion with God. While, as Richard Foster⁵⁶ reminds us, our praying will likely always have a foundation of simple asking to which we will return often, the more we learn the presence of God in stillness, the more we are formed by our soaking in the Word heard, the more we “abide in Him,” the more our praying will center on what is happening in our lives and how God is present in what is happening. Jesus tells us that, as we abide in Him, we can ask what we will, with asking is shaped by abiding (John 15:7). The object of this daily

⁵⁴ This is the main concern of Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word (Anniversary Edition)* (Upper Room, 2023).

⁵⁵ Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 129-133; Simon Chan’s chapter “Spiritual Exercises Focusing on the Word” (158-171), in *Spiritual Theology*, provides an excellent primer on meditative engagement with scripture and introduces the reader to classic resources informing formative engagement with scripture. See also, Susan Muto, “The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading: Revisiting Holy Scripture with Humble Receptivity” in *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* – Spring, 2012, Volume 5, Number 1. The edition is devoted to this topic.

⁵⁶ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 10. In addition to this excellent book there are many others worthy of close reading. Among them: Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (Penguin, 2016); O. Hallesby (Clarence Carlsen, Translator), *Prayer* (Augsburg Fortress, 1994); C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer* (HarperOne, 2017); Hans Urs von Balthasar (Graham Harrison, Translator), *Prayer* (Ignatius, 1986).

prayer then, is increased intimacy with God. We bring what is in us not what ought to be in us.⁵⁷ We pray what is happening more than we pray *about* what is happening, seeking to hear the heart of the Father in response. And, as is appropriate in conversations between loved ones, we listen as much as speak. We may extend the stillness, as time and practice allow, in centering prayer—sitting silently, attentively, in God’s presence, noticing our thoughts as they drift by without feeling the need to think them—but gently and without guilt bringing attention back to the stillness with a centering word or phrase.⁵⁸

As a final part of the daily rhythm, it will often be helpful to include a short written reflection in response to the word or the prayers or the silence. It is helpful to keep track of these things over time, allowing for an occasional Holy Spirit guided examen, seeking to discern the work and way of God in our lives.

As we move from the place of prayer, the goal would be to continue in prayer seeking to learn into praying without ceasing (1 Timothy 5:17). While there are many ways of understanding what Paul is encouraging here, for purposes of this paper, the goal would be to grow into the ongoing practice of the presence of Jesus.⁵⁹ *The Practice of the Presence of God* is a series of conversations in which Lawrence describes the process by which he learned over time to do everything for the love of God—seeking to turn his mind towards God in all things and to return to God if distracted. He encourages those who would learn this practice to begin each day

⁵⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer*, 21.

⁵⁸ There are many excellent books on centering prayer including: *Evagrius Ponticus: The Prakticos. Chapters on Prayer (Cistercian Studies)*, John Bamberger (translator) (Cistercian Publications, 1972); anonymous, Carmen Acevedo Butcher (translator/commentator) *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Shambhala, 2018); Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions, 2007); Thomas Keating, *Open Heart, Open Mind (Anniversary)* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019); Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Cowley, 2004); Marvin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Practice of Christian Contemplation* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Whitaker House, 1982). This classic work is available in a variety of formats and is worth reading and re-reading.

conversing with the risen and present Christ (the real Jesus and not just the idea of Him), surrendering the entire day to Him, asking Him to be with us each moment and to help us discern how He is present. Then, throughout the day, to keep an internal conversation with Christ going, reckoning with His real presence, dedicating the work of the moment to Him, seeking to serve and honor Him in everything said and done, returning without guilt to presence and awareness whenever we are distracted, or have responded to people or situations with our own strength rather than His. As often as possible, in returning to the pursuit of His presence, to express gratitude for His grace and commit ourselves to his love and mercy, and to show it to others. As the day concludes, to invite the Holy Spirit to take stock of how we did in the pursuit of the awareness of His presence and to then commit the day and evening to Him. Frank Laubach puts a modern spin on Lawrence's practice, but with the same overall result—a life busy with work to be done but shaped by and becoming prayer.⁶⁰

The focus of this paper has been to consider the importance of the transformation of the inner life, despite the culture of driven busyness which is prevalent and which often substitutes activity for effectiveness. Rather than a life that permanently retreats from engagement with the culture, the encouragement has been to choose practices that will enable engagement but from a still place—that will not be distracted by the hurry. This is the invitation to both those who work as the church in the world in various occupations but with the single calling to make disciples, and to those who serve the church in ministerial roles. John of the Cross is convinced, as are so many others, that even those who are busy with preaching and with doing good works would be better

⁶⁰ Frank Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic* (Martino Fine Books, 2021). *Practicing His Presence (The Library of Christian Classics, Volume 1)* (Seedsowers, 2017) combines the text of Brother Lawrence's conversations with Frank Laubach's practices.

off if they would devote less time to the doing of ministry and more time to praying.⁶¹ Only so will they be able to resist the pressures of the world to conform. The invitation is to slow down to keep up with God.⁶²

In the narrative of Jesus' visit to the home of Martha a familiar scene unfolds. Martha, as the home owner, is responsible for the hospitality—a high value in the ancient near east. She enters into serving of Jesus willingly but is soon distracted from Jesus by her serving of Jesus. She is perhaps also distracted by her younger sister's serving of Jesus—sitting as a disciple at His feet learning. When she seeks Jesus' intervention, He appears to rebuff her—but His love for her shines through. While Mary has chosen the good part—which will not be taken from her—Martha is not expected to do what Mary does. She is invited perhaps to be Martha but without distraction. Both gifts are needed arising from and contributing to intimacy with Jesus.⁶³

⁶¹ John Welch, *When Gods Die: An Introduction to John of the Cross* (Paulist Press, 1990), 195. See also Eugene Petersen, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Eerdmans, 1993) and *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Eerdmans, 1989)

⁶² implicit in Kosuke Koyama *Three Mile and Hour God* (SCM Press, 2021 reprint) where he argues that God moves at the speed of incarnation—which, he calculates, is three miles per hour.

⁶³ see Susan Muto, “Living Contemplatively and Serving God in the World: Two Sides of the Coin of Christian Ministry” in *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*, Spring 2013, Volume 6, Number 1

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