

DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

LECTURE OUTLINES

LECTURE ONE: GETTING STARTED

- A. INTRODUCTION
- B. THE SPIRITUAL YEARNING OF OUR TIMES
- C. SPIRITUALITY AND ORGANIZED RELIGION
- D. WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?
 - 1. Generic Spirituality:
Encountering the transcendent and being personally transformed by it
 - 2. Distinctively Christian Spirituality:
Encountering the living God and being renewed in Christ-likeness
 - 3. Christian Spirituality is Holistic: Living *all of life* before God
 - 4. Christian Spirituality is *Spirit*-uality:
Life Lived in the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit
- E. GOD’S ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR HUMAN BEINGS:
We Were Created in the Social, Substantive and Functional Image of God
- F. WHAT IS WRONG WITH US NOW?
Our Souls Have Become “Curved Inward” (Martin Luther), and Now Suffer from Alienation, Damage and Meaninglessness
- G. THE THREE ESSENTIAL DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
 - 1. The *Relational*: With God and Others
 - 2. The *Transformational*: Toward Holiness and Wholeness
 - 3. The *Vocational* (from Latin, *vocare*, “to call”): Discovering Purpose and Meaning
- H. A COMPREHENSIVE DEFINITION:
Christian Spirituality (or the Christian life, which is the same thing) is a Spirit-enabled relationship with the triune God that results in openness to others, healing progress toward Christ-likeness and willing participation in God’s purposes in the world.
- I. SUMMARY

The modern way of life has left the human spirit unsatisfied. Though organized religion has been found deficient, real *Spirit*-uality remains God’s gracious provision for the soul-hunger of every age. We have introduced a framework for understanding such spirituality—one that highlights its three essential dynamics. The first, the *relational*, deals with being in healthy relationship to God and others. The second, the *transformational*, examines the sanctifying and healing changes God’s Spirit works in our own souls. And the third, the *vocational*, considers the new life and mission to which we are called. These three are interconnected, and each is essential to life as God intended it to be.

LECTURE TWO: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUALITY

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses . . .
let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Heb. 12:1)

- A. LIVING IN THE BIBLICAL STORY:¹
Finding Our Place in Scripture’s Epic Tale of Creation, Sin, Redemption and Glorification
- B. THE PERSECUTED CHURCH:
“Though you have not seen him, you love him,” and are filled with inexpressible joy (1 Pet. 1:8)
- C. MONKS, MYSTICS, AND MISSION-FOCUSED BELIEVERS:
Christians of the Past and Their Literary Legacies
- D. HERMITS AND MONKS:
The Call to Contemplative Separation from the World
- E. MYSTICS AND SOLDIERS:
Lovers of God and Warriors for Christ
- F. REFORMERS AND WORLDLY SAINTS:
Spirituality Moves Back outside the Monastery
- G. PIETISTS AND PURITANS:
The Priority of Godly Affections and the Discipline of Soul-Crafting
- H. THE WESLEYS AND OTHER HOLINESS FOLK:
The Perfectionist Impulse and the Weight of Personal Choice
- I. CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN TODAY’S SECULAR AGE²
 - 1. Liturgical Christians Meeting God in the Sacraments
 - 2. Conservative Evangelicals Prioritizing the Word (Bible Reading and Preaching)
 - 3. Pentecostals Celebrating the Supernatural Presence and Power of God
 - 4. Liberal Cultivating Compassion and Passion for Justice
- J. SUMMARY:

We flew first over the landscape of the biblical story—the epic narrative of creation, fall and redemption, from the Garden of Eden to the Apostle John’s vision of the final victory of Jesus Christ. It is within this biblical tradition that we as Christians continue to live and move. But we are also interested in the quality of spirituality that characterized the countless saints who have followed them through the subsequent centuries. We want to know about their lives, because we are still part of the tradition they established. Their legacy is not infallible, but it is instructive and potentially very helpful. The basic patterns of Christian discipleship stand up pretty well through time.

¹ Barbara Bowe, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003).

² Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSF, 1998).

CHRIST *WITH* US
The Relational Dynamic

We were created for community,
but our sin has produced alienation.
By his Spirit, Christ is restoring our intimacy with God and others.

LECTURE THREE: FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Abraham “was called God’s friend” (James 2:23)

- A. WE ARE NOT ALONE: “He is there and he is not silent” (Francis Schaeffer)
- B. CREATED FOR RELATIONSHIP
- C. CHALLENGES TO RELATIONSHIP
 - 1. The Inward Curve of the Sinful Self (2 Tim. 3:2)
 - 2. Western Individualism
 - 3. Busyness
- D. KNOWING GOD’S TRUE CHARACTER
 - 1. The Importance of Knowing
 - 2. Overcoming Defective Father Images
- E. BELONGING TO GOD (Rom. 8:16)
- F. THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP
 - 1. Keeping Company with God (Gal. 5:25)
 - 2. Friendship with God (John 15:15)
- G. SPEAKING AND *LISTENING*
- H. GOD MUST BE FIRST
- I. AN ATMOSPHERE OF RECIPROCAL DELIGHT
- J. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:
Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), A. W. Tozer & John Piper
- K. SUMMARY

The first of Christian spirituality’s three essential dynamics is the relational. It begins with the realization that we are not alone—that there is a God, and he is not silent. Through Christ and his Spirit, God gives us a new standing before him, and draws us into experiences of his unspoken presence and even into interactive encounters with him. The confidence that God is good for us draws us to, and keeps us in, this vertical communion. What opens up before us is the possibility of a friendship with God characterized by reciprocal delight. In the next lecture, on the topic of experiencing community, we will consider our *horizontal* relationships with others and with creation.

LECTURE FOUR: EXPERIENCING COMMUNITY

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7)

A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION

B. OPENNESS TO THE OTHER: A NEW INCLINATION OF THE SOUL

1. Correcting the Centrifugal Tendency of Sin
2. Daring to Venture Out of Our Shells
3. The Hollow Victory Called “Easy-Believism”³

C. THE SPIRIT AND THE WELCOMING SELF:

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3)

1. The Decisive Choice: Exclusion or Embrace
2. Forgiveness: The Blessed Grace to Start Over

D. WE GROW THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

“The body of the church reinforces its individual parts when they are weak, including me, just as when I have a toothache on the right side of my mouth I am prompted to let the left side take over the chewing for a while. Often I have felt this strength of being ‘carried along’ like a small boat in a flowing current, by the community of faith.”⁴

E. THE CHURCH AS PROTOTYPE:

The Mission of the Church to Model Restored Relationships (John 13:34-35)

F. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE REST OF CREATION

G. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:

Benedict (480-550), Dietrich Bonhoeffer & Miroslav Volf

H. SUMMARY

The first dynamic of Christian spirituality is relational. It involves friendship with God and the experience of community. In this lecture we considered our horizontal relationships with others and creation. The self-giving love of God contagiously infects all those who draw close to him. They begin a regenerated journey beyond self-absorption to welcoming of others. They joyfully participate in the expanding web of relationships that grace makes possible. This divine uniting impulse, which the church is called to model, should also lead to a harmonious relationship with creation.

³ “To be afraid of hell or purgatory and desirous of a life without pain or trouble in heaven [is] not in itself Christian. It [is] self-interest on a higher level” (Walter Rauschenbusch)

⁴ Luci Shaw, in *Nouwen Then: Personal Reflections on Henri*, ed. Chris De Vinck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 45.

CHRIST *IN* US
The Transformational Dynamic

We were created holy and whole,
but our sin has damaged us.
By his Spirit, Christ is purifying and healing our true selves.

LECTURE FIVE: THE RENEWAL OF HOLINESS

“Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:1)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
- B. THE HOLINESS OF GOD (Isaiah 6:3, Rev. 4:8)
- C. CONTAGIOUS HOLINESS (2 Cor. 3:18)
- D. THE GOAL COMES INTO FOCUS AS CHRISTLIKENESS (Rom. 8:29)
- E. THE *HOLY* SPIRIT (meaning that holiness is his natural impulse)
- F. OUR PERVERSITY RUNS DEEP
- G. THE STARTING POINT OF AUTHENTICITY
 - 1. The Importance of Honesty (1 John 1:9)
 - 2. Psalm 137: An Old Testament Example of Radical Authenticity
 - 3. The Priority of Jesus: *Inner* Holiness (Matt. 12:33, 23:25)
- H. THE NECESSARY “DEATH” OF THE OLD NATURE
 - 1. The Cruciform Life (Rom. 6:4, Rom. 12:1, Gal. 2:20)
 - 2. The Continuation of Our Personal Identities
- I. THE ONGOING DISCIPLINE OF THE SELF (Col. 3:2-3, 5)
- J. SOUL-CRAFTING: THE FORMATION OF VIRTUE
Suffering and Separation
- K. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES
Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), Hannah Whitall Smith & J. I. Packer
- L. SUMMARY

We began our consideration of the transformational dynamic by studying the renewal of holiness. Sin has corrupted the moral purity of people created in the holy God’s image and likeness. We have become image-bearers *who sin*, and worse than that, we carry about in us a disposition to sin. The gospel is the good news that our sinful thoughts and actions can be forgiven through the atoning work of Christ. But the news is even better than this. God’s Spirit, who now resides in us, is also fixing the polluted source of our sins. He is gently but firmly moving us along in the direction of sanctification, progressively restoring the holiness with which we were originally designed.

LECTURE SIX: THE HEALING OF OUR WOUNDS

“I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
 - B. THE *WOUNDING* EFFECTS OF SIN
 - C. THE CHIEF SOURCES OF OUR WOUNDS
 - 1. Our Own Sinful Behaviors
 - 2. The Sinful Behaviors of Others
 - 3. The Realities of a Fallen and Dangerous World
 - D. THE SHAPE OF OUR WOUNDS
 - 1. Bondages
 - 2. Fears
 - 3. Self-Loathing
 - 4. Inability to Forgive
 - E. THE GOD WHO HEALS:
“I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26, Psalm 103:2-3)
 - F. GOD’S GRACE AS MENDING GLUE:
The *Substantial* Healing of the Total Person (Already but “Not Yet,” Rev. 22:2)
 - G. PHYSICAL HEALING (James 5:16) AND “INNER HEALING” (Psalm 147:3)
 - H. PROVEN MEANS OF HEALING:
The Word, Meditation and Prayer, Counselors, Community and Service
 - I. WOUNDED HEALERS:
Paul’s “thorn” (2 Cor. 12:7-10), “weakness” (2 Cor. 4:7-12) and imperfection (Phil. 3:12-14)
- The good news is that ministry and usefulness do not need to wait until we finally have it all together. If it required that, we would never get around to ministry. And God appears to prefer to work through people who are not depending on their own competence or personal health, but rather on God working through them.
- J. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:
Antony of Egypt (251-356), Henri Nouwen & David Benner
 - K. SUMMARY

God’s saving plan is to change us into persons who are both holy and whole. We have continued our survey of the transformational dynamic by exploring the movement of the Spirit toward *wholeness*. The consequences of sin—whether ours or someone else’s, it makes no difference—are painful and damaging. But God is the Great Physician. Out of compassion for us in our suffering, and by his Spirit, he has initiated a healing and restorative ministry in the world. It is substantial, though never complete, and it encompasses both our physical needs and our inner wounds. The encouraging news is that each of us can serve Christ as wounded healers of others.

CHRIST THROUGH US n **The Vocational Dynamic**

We were created for joyful participation in God's work in the world,
but sin has made our existence seem futile.
By his Spirit, Christ is rebuilding purpose and meaning into our lives.

LECTURE SEVEN: DISCOVERING PURPOSE AND MEANING

'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work' (John 4:34)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
- B. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATION:
The Christian Life as Connecting, Becoming and *Doing*
- C. THE CONSISTENT BIBLICAL PATTERN:
Examples from the Biographies of Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Paul
- D. THE *GIFT* OF COMMISSION (Klaus Bockmuehl)
- E. *HERE IS WHERE WE BELONG*
Authentic Christian spirituality follows the pattern of the incarnation—it becomes flesh. Vocation is following the heart of God into the world.
- F. THE PROBLEM OF MEANINGLESSNESS
- G. THE HUMAN SEARCH FOR MEANING:
"He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*" (Victor Frankl)
- H. ULTIMATELY, IT'S NOT ABOUT US (John 4:34)
- I. DIMENSIONS OF PURPOSE IN LIFE: WAYS TO GLORIFY GOD
 - 1. The Creational Mandate (Gen. 1-2)
 - 2. The Evangelistic Mandate (Matt. 28)
 - 3. Building the Kingdom (Matt. 6)
- J. HELP BEYOND OURSELVES (Phil. 4:13, John 15)
- K. HEARTS IN SYNC WITH THE HEART OF GOD:
Knowing God = Participation in the Divine Disposition
- L. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:
Augustine of Hippo (354-430), John Bunyan (1628-88) and Rick Warren
- M. SUMMARY:

The Christian life involves connecting, becoming and *doing*. We have begun our study of the *vocational* dynamic of Christian spirituality—God's gracious solution to the apparent futility of human existence. It is an incredible gift to be called to purposeful living and to contribute to a cause greater than ourselves. We discover meaning in life by aligning ourselves with God's call to steward creation, evangelize the nations, and build his kingdom. The spiritual life is one that is self-given to the greater movement of God's will.

LECTURE EIGHT: THE GIFT OF A PERSONAL CALLING

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you”
(Psalm 32:8)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
- B. THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING COMPANY WITH GOD:
“Keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25; compare Luke 21:12-15)
- C. THE FREEDOM OF BEING A TEAM MEMBER
- D. JOY *AND* USEFULNESS:
“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet”⁵ (Frederick Buechner)
 - 1. Personal Passion
 - 2. World Need
- E. CHALLENGES TO DISCERNMENT: OTHER COMPETING VOICES
 - 1. Skewed Values of Society (Social Conditioning)
 - 2. Our Own Creative Subconscious
 - 2. Deceptive Whispers of the Evil One
- F. OPTIMAL CONDITIONS FOR DISCERNMENT
 - 1. A Willingness to Listen (1 Sam. 3)
 - 2. Purity of Heart (Matt. 5:8, Prov. 11:3)
 - 3. An Eagerness to Obey (Heb. 11:8)
- G. THE FAMILIAR SPEAKING VOICE (John 10:4)
- H. THE ORDINARY CAN BECOME TINGED WITH GLORY (Rom. 12:1-3)
- I. HOPE AND COURAGE
- J. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:
Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), Parker Palmer and Gordon Smith
- K. SUMMARY

What we do with our lives is an essential element of true spirituality. Within the locus of God’s overarching purposes is a unique personal calling—a vocation—for each of us. The work and place to which God calls us will always be located at the intersection of our deep passion and the world’s great need, for personal fulfillment and useful service are inextricably bound together. We must not be terrified by our ordinariness either, for God has creative ways of infusing it with significance. Likewise our past failures never disqualify us from the hope of a significant life. But we do require two things: knowledge of our calling and the Spirit-empowered courage to follow it.

⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 119.

LECTURE NINE: AN INTEGRATED SPIRITUALITY

“As Jesus grew up, he increased in wisdom and in favor with God and people” (Luke 2:52)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
Authentic Christian spirituality is living all of life in relation to God, being transformed by the impulses of his Spirit, and participating in his larger purposes in the world.
- B. THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL CALL OF JESUS
- C. THE HOLY SPIRIT ACTIVELY ENCOURAGES ALL THREE DYNAMICS:
And we are to “keep in step” with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25)
 - 1. The Relational through his *Uniting* and *Assuring* Work
 - 2. The Transformational through his *Refining* and *Healing* Work
 - 3. The Vocational through his *Guiding* and *Empowering* Work
- D. THE THREE DYNAMICS ARE VITALLY INTERCONNECTED:
They are interwoven. Each feeds off the other two, and is essential to life as God intended it to be.
- E. THE PROPER BALANCE OF PRAYER AND WORK: *ORA* AND *LABORA*
Being Aware of Evangelical Tendencies toward Activism
- F. AN INTEGRATED PRAYER LIFE
 - 1. Prayers that Move Upward (Seeking Intimacy)
 - 2. Prayers that Move Inward (Seeking Transformation)
 - 3. Prayers that Move Outward (Seeking Ministry)
- G. ACCESSING THE RICH RESOURCES OF HISTORIC CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY:
The classic writers and godly voices from the past and present tend to emphasize different dynamics:
 - 1. *Mystical* Writers (Relationship with God)
 - 2. *Monastic*, Puritan and Holiness Writers (the Transformed Life)
 - 3. *Mission-Focused* Writers (Obedient Service, Justice and Ministry)
- H. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES:
Thomas Merton (1915-1968), Richard Foster and Dallas Willard
- I. SUMMARY

Each of us should seek to live a Christ-centered, Spirit-filled life characterized all three dynamics of Christian spirituality. These dynamics are linked together, dependent on one another, and equally important to our spiritual health. Christ calls us to experience them, and the Holy Spirit intentionally nurtures them in us. We should conscientiously incorporate all three into our prayer lives as well. Evangelicals especially need to be aware that an undue fixation on the vocational can drift toward functional secularism. The classics of Christian spirituality offer rich resources to be accessed with discernment. By measuring them against this three-dimensional standard, we can appreciate their insights while recognizing possible weaknesses and oversights.

LECTURE TEN: LIVING WITH DISCIPLINED INTENT

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them” (1 Tim. 4:15)

- A. REVIEW & INTRODUCTION
- B. THE LONGEST JOURNEY:
“The journey from head to heart is one of the longest and most difficult we know” (Donald Coggin)
- C. TRUE SPIRITUALITY IS NOT MERELY *OPTIONAL*
 - 1. Salvation Is More than a *Legal* Transaction
 - 3. Salvation Is about More than Just *Future* Blessings
- D. A PASSION FOR SPIRITUALITY:
The Call for a Counter-Cultural Stand (James 1:27)
- E. CREATING SPACE FOR GOD:
Chronological (Time), Psychological and Physical Space
- F. ALL THREE DYNAMICS ENRICHED BY READING THE BIBLE *SLOWLY*
- G. THE CLASSIC SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

“Grace is not opposed to *effort*, it is opposed to *earning*” (Dallas Willard). Spiritual disciplines are time-honored practices that help us create space for God, internalize his transforming truth, and experience his guidance and strength for our lives. There is *freedom* here to find what is most compatible with one’s own unique temperament and inclinations.

- 1. Hospitality and Neighborliness: Making Space for Others
 - 2. Spiritual Directors, Mentors and Friends
 - 3. Attentiveness: Self-Examination and Confession
 - 4. Simplicity
- H. THE UNEXPECTED (AND UNSOUGHT) PERSONAL DISCIPLINES (Rom. 8:28)
- I. SOME HELPFUL GUIDES
Francis de Sales (1567-1622), John & Charles Wesley, and Marjorie Thompson
- J. SUMMARY

This lecture explored the challenging journey from knowledge to experience—a journey the Spirit wants us, and encourages us, to take. It must begin and be sustained by a passion for the things of God. It then requires creating. It is a journey the Spirit always wants and encourages us to take. It must begin and be sustained by a passion for the things of God. It then requires creating space for God in our distracted lives. Our temperament will be a factor in determining the specific mix of contemplation and activity that will be best for us, but in general we all need to resist the hyperactive and superficial tendencies of contemporary culture. Spiritual disciplines are time-honored practices that help us create space for God, internalize his transforming truth, and experience his guidance and strength in our lives.