

Living Spirituality Study Guide

By Greg Laughery and Jasie Peltier

Christian spirituality is both overwhelmingly communal and intensely personal. As you read *slowly* and *carefully* through this book, we encourage you to think deeply about the questions and ideas presented. Following are some questions for discussion in a group, personal reflection, or both.

Chapter 1 – The Landscape

As we begin the journey forward into living spirituality, we have identified some components of our cultural landscape. This might also be a good time to consider the landscape of your own spirituality and its cultural influences. From what point are you starting? Some things to consider...

1. What images come to mind when you think of spirituality? Christianity?
2. What is the definition you use when you use the term spirituality? Christianity? Are they the same?
3. What spiritual options are you confronted with most often in your context? Why are they attractive/unattractive?
4. Can you identify places where cultural ideas have come into your notion of spirituality? Are they biblical?
5. Can you identify areas in your life where feeling rules? Do experiences come to mind where your feelings led you to false conclusions? True conclusions?
6. What do you think of when you hear the name Jesus Christ? God?
7. What is your reaction to the statement that “Jesus Christ is the gateway to living spirituality”?
8. On page 7, it is asserted that a spirituality rooted in Christ “explodes” our world. Do you perceive spirituality as limiting or expanding your experience? In what ways?

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[Deuteronomy 24:17-18](#)

[Romans 12:1-2](#)

[Colossians 1:15-20](#)

For Further Study:

[Everyday Theology](#), K.J. Vanhoozer

[God & Culture](#), D.A. Carson

[Seeing Through Cynicism](#), D. Keyes

Chapter 2 – Living Spirituality and the Way Ahead

1. How do the three dimensions of living spirituality listed – holistic, interpretative, and interactive - affect the way Christians live in the world? In what ways can you imagine them reversing spiritual impoverishment?
2. What do you think of the idea that any spirituality not centered in community with the God of the Bible leads to death?
3. What does living spirituality look like to you?
4. If you have attended church, take a moment to reflect on your experience. Have you been sufficiently educated and equipped? In what areas? Can you identify areas in which you need to pursue greater knowledge? How did the church help in your spiritual development? What aspects would you affirm and/or critique?
5. Authenticity is essential for living spirituality. What does it mean to be ‘real’? Imagine for a moment a few situations that you have found yourself in over the last week. Did you act authentically? How do you decide?

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.

--Psalm 86:11-12

Suggested Map Reading:

[Isaiah 40-55](#)

[Hebrews 1-6](#)

For Further Study:

[*The Universe Next Door*](#), J. Sire

[*Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*](#), E. Peterson

Chapter 3 – The Map, Map Reading, and Living Spirituality

1. When planning a path, a destination is assumed. What do you think is the destination of Christian spirituality? How does that affect the way you act towards others and in the world?
2. How does the idea of following a “prescribed, mapped-out route” – *not* trailblazing – fit into your notion of spirituality? How does it relate to our cultural context?
3. What do you think about the definition of theology as “chiefly about the study of God and the Scripture”? Do you see theology as related to your spirituality, or something better left to professional theologians? Why?
4. Notice that theology is an added dimension to the three already mentioned in chapter two. Five reasons are given as to why spirituality would require a theological mapping.
 - a. To come to sufficient understanding of God.
 - b. To find our spiritual bearings.
 - c. To holistically enlighten our hearts and minds.
 - d. To have a greater degree of objectivity in what we affirm and critique as truly or falsely spiritual.
 - e. To discern how to live the whole of life in community with God and each other in God’s world.

Can you think of other reasons?

5. Reflect on the notion of relation and distinction regarding the map of Scripture. Can you think of problems other than those mentioned when you make it up as you go along?

Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

--Psalm 119:33-34

Suggested Map Reading:

[Psalm 119](#)

[Colossians 3:1-17](#)

[James 1:1-25](#)

For Further Study:

[*How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*](#) – G. Fee & D. Stuart

[*Eat This Book*](#), E. Peterson

Chapter 4 – The Spirit is the Guide

1. How do you understand the Holy Spirit and his functions? On page 31 a couple of passages are listed (John 13-16, Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 12-14). What are some of the things you noticed? Can you think of other passages that reveal something of the Holy Spirit?
2. “In theory, Christians acknowledge the importance of having the Bible as the map for the journey, but in practice they tend to ignore it in favor of the direct intervention and revelation of the Spirit.” (p. 29) Does this gel with what you have been taught? Experienced? Why do you think this “direct intervention” is often perceived as being more spiritual?
3. What do you think of the idea of “interpretative self-deception”? What are some factors that can play into this? Can you think of times when you or those around you have fallen prey?

*Almighty and most merciful God, grant that by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit we may be enlightened and strengthened for your service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.*

--Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[John 13-16](#)

[Romans 8](#)

[1 Corinthians 12-14](#)

For Further Study:

[Keep In Step With The Spirit](#), J.I. Packer

[Why Do You Believe What You Believe About the Holy Spirit?](#), G. McFarlane

Chapter 5 – God, Creation and Living Spirituality

1. How does the relation/distinction configuration resonate with what you've been taught about creation and God?
2. Can you think of some ways that God reveals something of the spiritual in the material world?
3. What are your thoughts about how we've done with our mandate for respecting creation? Do you see the Christian response changing at all? In what ways? Does it need to change?
4. In what ways can you see that we've put God and/or creation into a box because of an insufficient creational grounding of our spirituality?
5. Can you think of some other ways that a creational understanding opens the world up?
6. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? What are some competing cultural narratives that assign value to humanity?

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[Genesis 1-3](#)

For Further Study:

[How to Read Genesis](#), T. Longman

[In the Beginning](#), H. Blocher

[For the Beauty of the Earth](#), S. Bouma-Prediger

Chapter 6 – Problems of Disregarding Creator and Creation

1. Do you identify with Kevin's story? Do you find it easy to get overwhelmed by the amount of evil in the world and doubt God's goodness? Why do you suppose people have the tendency to banalize good in the face of evil?
2. What do you think of the idea that evil is non-original and parasitic on an original good? In what ways are the cultural narratives about the nature of good and evil related to/distinct from this configuration?
3. So far, the idea of both/and has been stressed, but with the problem of good and evil we must switch to an either/or. The either/or implies certain absolutes. How do you feel about that? What do you think that the counter-cultural action of "endorsing and enacting" the truth of the primacy of goodness might look like in your life?
4. After reading Linda's story, can you think of other ways 'salvation alone' might impact your spirituality and ways in which a creational grounding could transform it?
5. In your experience, has the church encouraged or discouraged a dualism between the material world and the spiritual? Something of a sacred/secular divide? Can you think of circumstances in which you would want to either challenge or affirm the divide?
6. What are some of the other ways to talk about the referents of spirituality? In your context, what are some of the primary referents proposed by the dominant worldview? How does a good creation with a good creator critique/affirm these?

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[Genesis 1](#)

[Romans 1](#)

[Colossians 1](#)

For Further Study:

[*Evil and the Justice of God*](#), N.T. Wright

[*Evil and the Cross*](#), H. Blocher

[*Affliction*](#), E. Schaeffer

Chapter 7 – Living Spirituality in Brokenness

1. When Adam and Eve ‘eat the forbidden fruit’, so to speak, it instigates “death with God.” How does this notion of sin and its consequences gel with the cultural narrative? How can we deal with true evil in a relativistic culture?
2. As we discuss some of the patterns of covenant making (and breaking) in the Old Testament, we discover that God is a promise-making God. What are some other attributes that can be seen in these narratives?
3. The shockingly realistic portrayal of life in the Psalms encompasses the whole range of human emotion and experience, even the negative ones. Is this kind of a messy, difficult spirituality the one that is commonly ‘advertised’ by the church? Do you think that the reality of living Christian spirituality as portrayed in the Psalms would be more or less appealing to the culture both within and outside of the church? Why?
4. It is observed on page 60 that the prophets “intensely mourn the loss of community with God and offer a severe critique of the life of God’s people. They attempt to shake these people from their complacency and radical sinfulness in order to make them aware of their covenant responsibilities so that they might return to God and live.” Why is mourning part of this? What can the prophets teach us about some of our functions within the church? About the purpose of critique and the manner in which we make it?

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

--Psalm 139:23-24

Suggested Map Reading:

[Genesis 12; 15; 17](#)

[Job 38-42](#)

[Psalm 42; 44; 60; 71](#)

For Further Study:

[*Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, C. Plantinga](#)

Chapter 8 – The Messiah and the Kingdom of God: Redemption Arrives

1. We see in scripture that there were many misconceptions about who Messiah was and what he would do. Can you think any misconceptions that the church or culture currently has about Christ? Are they corrected to some degree, as John was, by Jesus' response in Matthew 11?
2. We see in Jesus' life a "reversing [of] the trajectory of the disfiguring of creation." (p. 66) As we follow him, what are some ways that our lives can mirror this reversal?
3. In looking at the Kingdom of God, we have stated two things it is not: it is not the church and it is not narrow. In keeping with our theological perspective of relation and distinction, what are some ways to evaluate these statements?
4. We see that the Kingdom of God is God's rule that has both already arrived and is not yet complete. How does this understanding impact your notion of Christian mission in the world?

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[Matthew 3-7](#)

[John 1](#)

For Further Study:

[The Challenge of Jesus](#), N.T. Wright

[The Jesus I Never Knew](#), P. Yancey

Chapter 9 – Living Spirituality in the Already and Not Yet

1. Have you experienced either of the extremes of the already/not yet thinking in your church context? In what ways did it manifest itself?
2. We've used the example of the body from Paul's letter to the Corinthians as an example of a narrow focus on the 'already'. Can you think of some other false dichotomies that this focus could cause?
3. Does Cindy's story resonate with you? What are some appropriate expectations for the Christian life in the already?
4. Can you think of some practical ways in which the truth of the kingdom of God being a present reality in our lives can impact the way we worship God, look at the world, view ourselves, etc? (See p. 77)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

--Romans 15:13

Suggested Map Reading:

[1 Corinthians](#)

For Further Study:

[The Presence of the Future](#), G. E. Ladd

[Theology of Hope](#), J. Moltmann

Chapter 10 - The Death and Resurrection of Christ

1. Having identified some of the problems of having ME at the center of our spirituality, what are some ways in which we can go about re-centering our faith?
2. How do you perceive the movement of a Christian from the reign of sin to the reign of grace? How does this work to transform identity?
3. Read Ephesians 1:15-23. Does this statement about the power at work within/for us change your vision of the Christian life? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. We have seen that within the tension of Christian spirituality, we are reckoned dead to sin on the one hand, and yet sin in our lives is still a present reality. What does this mean to you? How does one go about continually reckoning oneself dead to sin? What are ways in which this truth draws us into “dynamic community with the living God and his people?”
5. It is suggested here that discipline alone cannot realign us out of an orientation to sin and into grace. How does this gel with the contemporary worldview that tells us that we can have/accomplish anything if only we work hard enough? How would you critique this worldview?
6. It is not always easy (and sometimes impossible!) to know our own motives. Given this reality, how do we determine when we are obeying from the heart and when we are performing? What are the roles of feelings here?
7. What are some ways in which the biblical notion of freedom is related to/distinct from our cultural ideas regarding freedom?

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

-- Hebrews 13:20-21

Suggested Map Reading:

[Romans 6](#)

[Ephesians 1](#)

For Further Study:

[Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection](#), S. Davis

[Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in an Everyday Life](#), E. Peterson

Chapter 11 – Justification and Sanctification

1. Do you identify more with Jason or Caroline? What has been your understanding of justification?
2. Often in the church we believe that our faith saves us. How does the relation/distinction configuration of justification nuance our understanding?
3. In speaking of sanctification in degrees, do you believe that it is possible to move backwards – to become *less* sanctified?
4. Have you ever struggled with what we are calling “false-option identity syndrome”? What are/were the poles you tend to gravitate towards? Does a both/and approach help resolve them? How?
5. As we continue in the process of sanctification, another relation/distinction comes to mind: We are becoming like Christ, but we are not becoming Christ. We retain our uniqueness and individuality. How does this configuration contribute to understanding ourselves not as “zeroes”, but as salt and light of the earth? How does it inform our sense of Christian mission?
6. One of the points of tension that increases as we grow in understanding the diversity of the body of Christ is seeking to understand the components of our personality which are good and contribute to our uniqueness, and which others are harmful. This is particularly true in a culture that highly prizes particular ‘types’ of people and personalities. What are some criteria that we can use as we navigate the path and seek a fuller understanding of our identity?
7. Is the understanding of the blood of Christ as both prescriptive and preventative familiar to you? What are some areas in your life that you can see this truth played out? Places in which forgiveness led to transformation? What are some areas in which the prescriptive view may have hindered transformation?

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[1 Corinthians 1-4](#)

[Hebrews 10](#)

[Romans 5](#)

Further Reading:

[True Spirituality](#), F. A. Schaeffer

[Beyond Identity](#), D. Keyes

Chapter 12 – Knowledge

1. What do you think of the statement that “to demand one hundred percent knowledge is a violation of the creator/creature relationship and is therefore a sin?” (p. 123) Or the opposite view that embraces total ambiguity? Have you ever thought about knowledge claims in moral terms? Do you think it is appropriate? What are the competing claims about knowledge in your context?
2. How would you describe *sufficient* knowledge? What are some of the criteria that would need to met for you to feel comfortable making a knowledge claim? What external forces inform you?
3. We often focus on the “see through a glass darkly” in 1 Corinthians 13:12, but have you ever thought about what it will be like when we see “face to face”? Remembering the theological perspectives of relation/distinction and continuity/discontinuity, what do you think this means for our future knowledge?

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom: Enlighten by your Holy Spirit those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship you and serve you from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

--The Book of Common Prayer

Suggested Map Reading:

[1 Corinthians 13](#)

Suggestions for Further Study:

[Total Truth](#), N. Pearcey

[A Primer on Postmodernism](#), S. Grenz

[Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be](#), J. Richard Middleton & B. Walsh

[Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?](#) J. K.A. Smith

Chapter 13 – Facing Adversity

1. As we seek to contextualize our present adversity, what are some ways in which we can place ourselves in the larger narrative of redemption? What are some of the landmarks that would be useful in helping us place ourselves?
2. Are you part of a community that aids you in seeing the long view of adversity? Do you think that such a community is as important as we have stated? Why or why not?
3. Take a moment and consider Sarah's story. Have you been in a similar situation? If so, how did you deal with the internal disintegration that took place? Were you able to resolve it? If a similar situation were to occur again, would you handle it differently? In what ways?
4. How can you take some of the ideas drawn from Paul's letter to the Philippians and flesh them out? What are some of the ways we can depend on God while being responsible for working out our salvation with fear and trembling? Think about this particularly in the face of adversity.
5. What are some of the primary places in which you encounter adversity/oppression in your life? Take a moment to consider as well the ways, intentional or unintentional that you may cause adversity for those around you.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, first and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen

--1 Peter 5:10-11

Suggested Map Reading:

[Philippians](#)

For Further Study:

[Pathways to Wholeness](#), R. Hurding

[Embodying Forgiveness](#), L. G. Jones

[Exclusion and Embrace](#), M. Volf

Chapter 14 – Losing and Finding the Path

1. Have you ever fallen to the extremes of either legalism, total freedom, or both? What things were/are instrumental for you in returning to the path?
2. As we took a long view of our present adversity, so it can be helpful to take a long view of some of the painful circumstances of our past. Take a moment to consider your own story, and try to imagine ways in which it can be re-narrated into your life in a redemptive way. How does it fit within the larger biblical drama of creation, fall and redemption?

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

--Psalm 51:10-12

Suggested Map Reading:

[Romans 7-8](#)

[Matthew 22](#)

For Further Study:

[*To Be Told: Know Your Story, Shape Your Future*](#), D. Allender

Chapter 15 – Love and Community

1. In contrast to becoming a “zero”, we observe that self-love is good and appropriate in the context of being loved by God. What do you think this self-love looks like? How do you imagine that a healthy self-love would bring about transformation in your life? Transformation in your community? What are some of the criteria for distinguishing between healthy vs. unhealthy self-love?
2. Can you think of some instances in your experience that the church, or you, expressed living Christian love? Times when it was not expressed? What were some of the factors that influenced the ways those situations played out?
3. Can you think of ways in which Christian love can/should function beyond the individual level and move into the corporate/structural level of society and culture? How, as an individual, can you strive for those things?
4. In learning to greater appreciate the differences between people and cultures, how could one adopt a posture of learning?
5. Are you a part of a community like the one described here, engaged with scripture, culture, etc.? What can you do to find/develop such a community?

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

-- Romans 15:5-6

Suggested Map Reading:

[John 13](#)

[1 Corinthians 12-13](#)

For Further Study:

[Life Together](#), D. Bonhoeffer

[The Disciplined Heart](#), C. Simon

Chapter 16 – Our Destiny and Destination

1. As you consider the Christian destiny of transformation into the image of Christ, how does it make you feel? Why?
2. Is the ultimate destination of a renewed earth (as opposed to a more celestial state) a new one for you? What are some ways in which Christian spirituality should/would change if this teaching were taken seriously by the church? Do we take it seriously enough?
3. As we close the journey of this book, take a moment to consider the path of living Christian spirituality laid out here. Which things discussed were familiar to you? What parts seemed like foreign landscapes?

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore. Amen.

--Jude 1:24-25

Suggested Map Reading:

[Genesis 9](#)

[1 Corinthians 15](#)

[Romans 8](#)

[Revelation 21-22](#)

For Further Study:

[Heaven is a Place on Earth](#), M. Wittmer

[Heaven](#), R. Alcorn