

# Spiritual Choreography



Seven Rhythms for Moving with the Spirit Through Everyday Life



# **Spiritual Choreography**

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LiveFull

*Spiritual Choreography*

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*This guide is dedicated to Drew Teague,  
who taught me the first steps.*

## ***How to Use This Guide***

In this guide, you'll learn how to take your relationship with God from a quick "quiet time" that checks a box to moving with him seamlessly through every moment of your day. When you're finished, send us your [questions and feedback](#) so that we can add new insights to the next version.

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**Enter the Dance**

When I was in college, you didn't mess with my devotional time.

I was fresh into following Jesus, and I quickly learned that the more time I spent reading the Bible and praying, the closer I got to him. I was madly in love with Jesus, so as soon as I understood this dynamic, I threw myself into the habits of grace like Peter threw himself into the water at the sight of Jesus on the shore (John 21:7). To the delight of my roommates, my morning routine consisted of waking up at 4:30 am and cracking open the Bible while I popped a caffeine pill or sipped with sophistication on grape-flavored caffeinated Crystal Lite packets, depending on how classy I was feeling that day. If springing out of bed brought me to Jesus, nothing was going to stop me, not even sleep.

Or people, for that matter. In one of the more cringey examples of my relentless discipline, I remember flipping out at the leader of my college ministry because he had the gall to schedule a group devotional when I had planned on having my private devotional. In my mind, this was an appropriate time to flip tables. *How dare*

*he keep me from meditating on the patience and loving kindness of Christ?*

Underneath my rigid insistence on keeping the disciplines, there was a genuine desire to know Jesus more. But there was also a subtle disconnection sneaking into my heart. If you've been walking with God for long, perhaps you can relate to this shift:

- First, I fell in love with Jesus.
- Then, I learned that devotions helped me love him more.
- Then, I decided that it was really important to practice my daily devotions.

Over time, this progression changed in my heart to something like this:

- Devotions help me love Jesus more.
- It is really important to practice my daily devotions.
- Practicing my daily devotions is the goal.

Do you see the shift?

When devotions are the goal, we see interruptions from people as an obstacle to grace instead of an opportunity for it. When devotions are the goal, we confine our walk with God to a ritual and miss out on the breezy grace of moment-by-moment relationship. When devotions are the goal, we leave behind the first love with Jesus and—crazy enough—start to idolize our own spiritual disciplines over the person of the Holy Spirit.

When devotions are the goal, we leave behind the first love with Jesus and—crazy enough—start to idolize our own spiritual disciplines over the person of the Holy Spirit.

## THE SOLUTION TO RIGIDITY

I'm not the only one, right? OK, I was the only one who chugged grape Crystal Lite at 4:30 in college. I accept that. But there's something about my rigidity that runs as a consistent thread through the human heart.

Do you have an all-or-nothing approach to quiet times? When you get up to read and pray and journal, you feel like you could march around town singing "Oceans"

like your faith is without borders. But the next day, you slam the snooze button seven times, and all of the sudden, you're walking around with a bad mood that very much wants borders between you and every other human.

That's a sign of a rigid heart that's forgotten who you were when Jesus saved you. When he said, "Follow me," you weren't a morning-routine all-star sitting high in the 5 am Club. You were dead. In a coffin. Uninterested. Unable. And Jesus came and got you.

Does he still do that today? Is he still gracious? Will he still chase you in love on the days when you're dragging your feet? Your theology might say, "Yes," but if your daily joy in Jesus rises and falls depending on the quality of your quiet time, then your heart says, "No."

Thankfully, this isn't a new problem. Tying our peace to our performance is a universal issue going all the way back to the very first Christians. Paul's whole letter to the Galatians is a divinely-inspired diatribe against their move away from the freedom of the gospel into a harsh slavery under the law. After throwing some apostolic elbows at their return to slavery, he points them down the proper path of life.

How can you keep your peace, even when you missed your planned time of prayer? How can you have habitual joy, even when life throws off your habits from time to



time? How can you walk with the Lord in the cool of the day, even when you're feeling the heat of real-life responsibilities?

It turns out that the solution isn't a method or a mantra or any kind of modern framework.

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*"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."  
(Galatians 5:16)*

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The key to walking with Jesus is to walk with Jesus—to avoid breaking down your faith into a mechanical set of principles and to remember that you are pursuing a real relationship with a real Person. He's not a predictable deity conjured by your morning chants. He's alive. He's vibrant. And he's stored up new mercies and new opportunities and new adventures for you whether you're rising-and-shining or not.

It really is as simple for you as it was for the first disciples who heard the words, "Follow me." The difference is that with the disciples, Jesus led from ahead. With you, *he leads from within*.

## FROM DISCIPLINES TO DANCING

We're not talking about doing away with the Word of God and prayer. That's like treating an eating disorder by banning

food or kicking a smoking addiction by boycotting air. Stop eating food, and you'll starve; stop breathing, and you'll die. Stop feeding on the Word of God, and you will grow malnourished. Stop praying, and you will start to spiritually suffocate. What is needed is a shift in *how* we eat and *how* we breathe—a fresh perspective on and approach to walking with God in Word, prayer, and faith through every moment of the day.

The difference is that with the disciples, Jesus led from ahead. With you, he leads from within.

Didn't Jesus say that this should be easy (Matthew 11:30)? He didn't mean "easy" in the sense that it requires little of you. Jesus made it clear again and again that this will cost you everything (Matthew 16:24).

It's easy because even though you have to fight to get out of bed and into the Bible, you know that the King of the Universe is waiting to meet with you in the living room.

It's easy because even though you have to put yourself in a position of prayer, once you start talking to God, the Spirit starts carrying the conversation.

## ENTER THE DANCE

It's easy because even though you're carrying a cross, the scarred Savior is next to you, holding up the beam, turning an excruciating burden into an easy yoke.

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases Jesus' warm invitation. Read this slowly, as if Jesus is talking to you (because he is):

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*"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."*  
(Matthew 11:28-30)

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This guide is about learning the unforced rhythms of grace. It's about living freely and lightly again with Jesus, who is as free and light as they come. He can show you how to live like he does. He can heal the scars of striving. He can pour cool water on the dry places of your heart. He can deliver real rest again—the kind you tasted when you first believed.

He can teach you. He can lead you. All you have to do is *enter the dance*.

What do I mean?

Rituals are good. But Jesus wants to turn them into unstoppable rhythms.

Quiet times are needed. But Jesus wants to take the peace you taste in the silence and help you experience it in the cacophony of life.

Devotions are indispensable. But Jesus wants your daily devotions to turn into a daylong dance.

This guide is about learning the unforced rhythms of grace. It's about living freely and lightly again with Jesus, who is as free and light as they come.

There are two ways to see your morning quiet time. You can see it like a coaching appointment. It's your "time with Jesus," when he gives you a brief encouragement and then sends you out to handle the work, the bills, the kids, the conflict, and the mess on your own, as if he's saying goodbye, sending you into the game, and watching from a distance.

Or you can see your devotion like the start of the dance. It isn't your "time with Jesus," because he gets all of your time, 24/7, day and night. It isn't a coaching sync-up because he never says goodbye and he never expects you to do it on your

## SPIRITUAL CHOREOGRAPHY

own. Instead, it's the start of a dance—or even better, the continuation of a lifelong dance—where Jesus guides you through life with ease, moment by moment, move by move, one small synchronized step of faith at a time.

Rhythms, on the other hand, are never completed. They are never checked off. They are carried out as a way of life, moment by moment.

This guide is about a way of approaching the spiritual disciplines that I call “spiritual choreography,” which is putting a new term on a way of life that has always marked God's Spirit-filled saints. Spiritual choreography is the practice of moving with the Spirit through every moment of the day. Through his Spirit, Jesus is the choreographer, the leader, the guide. Your job is simply to follow him—

through Scripture, through prayer, and through faith.

In the following chapters, we will explore seven rhythms that will help you walk with the Spirit in every moment of the day. The difference between rhythms and mere rituals is that rituals are completed daily (or hourly or weekly). You can check them off. Rhythms, on the other hand, are never completed. They are never checked off. They are carried out as a way of life, moment by moment. Spiritual choreography is the practice of learning how to read the Word, pray to God, and walk by faith—not merely as a daily habit for spiritual growth—but as an unending consequence of staying in step with the movement of the Spirit.

Burnout doesn't have to be your baseline. Exhaustion doesn't have to always come by the end of the day. Disconnection doesn't have to stay the story of this season with Jesus. You can enter the dance of endless delight, here and now. And it all begins with stepping onto the floor of grace.



**Spiritual choreography is the practice of moving with the Spirit through every moment of the day.**



# **The Rhythm of Relationship**

# Seven Spiritual Rhythms

## The Rhythm of Relationship

1. Go to God

## The Rhythms of the Word

2. Read the Word

3. Ingest the Truth

## The Rhythms of Prayer

4. Pray to God

5. Persist in Conversation

## The Rhythms of Faith

6. Expect the Spirit

7. Do What He Says

The biggest reason why we miss out on the dance with Jesus is that we choose a different partner.

I remember a few years ago when Jesus convicted me about my habit of going to ESPN.com whenever I felt bored, anxious, or stressed throughout the day. I had no clue that I was using a sports website to escape from my emotions and avoid God. I just thought I was checking on the score. But at some point, the Spirit showed me that it was more. My inability to sit alone by myself reflected an inability to sit alone with God—to bring him my unrest, to ask him for strength, and to wait for his help.

The biggest reason why we miss out on the dance with Jesus is that we choose a different partner.

What's your escape of choice? We could call these "go-to substitutes"—the places you go to instead of God when you have

a twinge of social discomfort, when you remember a distressing situation that is unresolved, and when you feel any kind of existential void.

Cassidy, my friend and co-teacher at LiveFull, told me that her go-to substitute was Zillow. Checking out real estate isn't my thing, but that's what's interesting about go-to substitutes—they're tailor-made for you.

Do you feel like life isn't panning out the way you wanted it to? Don't worry; meet Instagram, where you can stare at a bunch of people for whom life is panning out wonderfully. Do you struggle with always feeling like your wardrobe could be more expensive, fashionable, or in style? Meet online shopping, where you are always one click away from better. Has your obsession with athletic competitiveness from your days in youth sports continued to stick with you well into adulthood? Have no fear. Enter ESPN—you can live vicariously through athletes who made it.

Unless they are outright immoral, go-to substitutes never appear sinister—that is,

until you break them down and ask why that particular escape is so attractive to you.

Let's go back to that passage from the last chapter, this time in the NIV:

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*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*  
(Matthew 18:28-30)

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"Rest for your souls." That's what we're all going after. It's why we have go-to substitutes. We want something to put an end to the exhaustion, the insecurity, the unease. We want someone or something or somewhere to bring a soft wave of rest over our weary souls.

And this is precisely what Jesus offers us. What always eludes us with the substitute is promised with the Savior. Joy, peace, satisfaction, rest, the unmistakable sense that all is well with your soul. But if you want this from Jesus, you have to catch his condition:

*"Come to me."*

True soul rest is only promised for those who come to Jesus. I've often found myself calling out (*read: complaining*) to God about feeling sad or overwhelmed, only for the Spirit to gently remind me yet again

that I'm carrying such a heavy yoke simply because I haven't come.

You will never have an easy yoke as long as you escape. If you want to experience the light and easy life with Jesus—if you want to move with the "unforced rhythms of grace"—you have to form the habit of walking onto the floor and choosing Jesus.

## **RHYTHM #1: GO TO GOD**

If you're a dancer, you're tracking with this metaphor of spiritual choreography. The first time I brought up the concept to a group of college students, one girl who had grown up in competitive dance was fiercely locked in with me, as though I was speaking her native language. Meanwhile, all of the guys in the group looked absolutely lost—as if I was telling them that the key to unlocking spiritual power is a pirouette.

I'm no dancer, but I still like the metaphor because it captures what the Christian life is meant to look like. When Jesus ascended to the Father, he didn't first send his disciples a set of practices, a plan for growth, or a roadmap to success. He sent a Person to follow. This is why, when Paul breaks down the essence of following Jesus, he tells us to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

Keep in step. That sounds like what I tried terribly hard to do (and miserably failed) the first time I slow danced in the sixth grade.

While “Let It Burn” by Usher played in the background, I nervously smiled through my bright-blue braces, trying to look like I knew what I was doing. But I kept looking down, stepping on my partner’s toes, and moving in the opposite direction. I looked more like a malfunctioning robot than a smooth dancer.

That’s kind of like learning how to follow the Holy Spirit, minus the middle-school angst. You start out unsure. You don’t know how the Spirit moves. You guess wrong half the time and go in the wrong direction.

But slowly, over time, as he patiently sticks with you and teaches you, you start to pick up on his ways.

I don’t mean that you can always guess where he’s going to take you. Far from it. The Spirit is consistent in his character but unpredictable in his ways. But like a trained dancer who has stuck with the same partner for years, you can acquire a better sense of when he’s bringing you in or leading you out, when he’s speeding up or slowing down, when he’s gently nudging left or right.

If you want to learn how to move with the Spirit, you have to learn the first and most foundational rhythm: *go to God*. This is where we choose, moment by moment, to bring our hearts to God instead of other substitutes. It’s where we tell Jesus, “I prefer you over any other partner.” It’s

where we cut off those cheap escapes that only deepen our misery and go to the one who offers true rest.

This is where we choose, moment by moment, to bring our hearts to God instead of other substitutes. It’s where we tell Jesus, “I prefer you over any other partner.”

I say that this is the most foundational rhythm—even before Word and prayer (both of which are coming later)—because if you’re not going to God, then it’s easy to use devotional methods to avoid God.

That’s right—you can actually use devotions to avoid God. It’s like the exasperated teenager who meets her parents’ expectations *just enough* so that they won’t bother her. If she can keep the peace, sit at the dinner table, help out a little bit with the chores, and stay out of trouble, then her parents have no reason to engage deeply with her. She’s appeasing the standards of what a good child looks like, only so that she doesn’t have to deal with her parents at a deep level.

In my early college days, I found myself subtly drifting into this type of



“appeasing” spirituality that avoided truly engaging with God. If I could check off my reading plan, journal a little bit, and pray for a while, then I could walk away self-assured that I had met God’s expectations. The problem is that I often wasn’t really meeting with God. I was doing God-adjacent things, but I wasn’t engaging with the heart of the Lord.

There is one practice that snapped me out of this—and I’ve practiced it ever since to align my heart toward an actual pursuit of God. Right after I wake up, before I jump into autopilot and flip my Bible to the daily reading plan, I say a short prayer to God (I’m talking about one sentence or five seconds).

That’s it. Say something to God before you slip into the routine.

When it’s super early and the coffee hasn’t cooled down enough not to fry my tongue, I am not aiming to render the kingdom to earth with a prayer that will send a shockwave through the heavens. I’m just trying to say “Good morning” to God.

One simple “Hello” to your Father, first thing in the morning, reminds your soul that he is a real Person with a real heart containing real desires to care for your soul. He’s not a deity to appease; he’s an Abba to know.

It’s a good idea to connect this “Good morning” to some Scripture—that way, you reap the double benefit of bringing

your soul to God and starting off your day with inspired truth. For example, I’ll often start my day with a simple prayer, “Good morning, Lord. Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18). Again, I’m not winning a Pulitzer with this prayer. But in one five-second request, I’m acknowledging that (1) God is in the room and (2) he has wondrous things to show me in his Word. And that simple recognition can make the difference between going through the motions and a powerful encounter with the God of Heaven.

Make it a habit to say “Good morning” to God before you say “Good morning” to any human, device, task, issue, anxiety, or cleaning chore.

That’s what it means to go to God first thing in the morning. Make it a habit to say “Good morning” to God before you say “Good morning” to any human, device, task, issue, anxiety, or cleaning chore.

This simple practice speaks an unmistakable message to God and to your own soul that the goal of your day is to move with the Spirit of God. You’re not

dancing with anxiety. You're not dancing with comparison. You're not even dancing with your vocational dreams, your tasks for the day, or your service to your spouse/kids/family. God comes first. He's your dance partner, and he's the one who gets to hold you, lead you, and tell you where to go.

Now, ideally, all of this is happening in the still of the morning—when the coffee is steaming into your nose, the sun is breaking past the horizon, and the bluebirds are chirping in the brisk morning air. But what happens when your day starts off with an awful backache and you have to leave for work in 15 minutes? What if you wake up to a restless toddler climbing into your bed at 5:47 am? What if your roommate barges into your dorm room first thing in the morning and starts talking to you about their relationship problems?

When life is suboptimal and interrupted and unexpected (and it usually is), the key is to give what you have and offer an imperfect, unrehearsed, and unimpressive “Hello” to God. If you only have two coins of energy and time to give, just drop those two in the bucket. Jesus will love when you give out of your poverty (Mark 12: 41–44).

I love this quote capturing a conversation between two fourth-century desert fathers (Christian monks who were more disciplined than you or I). They,

too, apparently had problems waking up sometimes.

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*“A brother asked one of the hermits, ‘If I happen to over-sleep, and am late for the hour of prayer, I am ashamed that others will hear me praying so late, and so I become reluctant to keep the rule of prayer.’ (The hermit) said, ‘If ever you oversleep in the morning, get up when you wake, shut the door and the windows, and say your psalms. For it is written, “The day is thine and the night is thine” (Ps. 74:16). God is glorified whatever time it is.”*  
*(Benedicta Ward, The Desert Fathers)*

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Whether it's 5 am or 6 am or 11 am—whether it feels like you have all the space in the world or none at all—give your first “Good morning” to God. He loves to hear your voice, no matter what time it is.

## GO TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING

The goal of spiritual choreography is to move with the Spirit through every moment of the day. We're talking about rhythms, not just rituals. Going to God starts as a one-sentence prayer first thing in the morning, but it continues as a heart-habit of bringing everything to God. We go to God first thing in the morning

so that we can continue to go to him for everything throughout the day.

We walk to God first and take his hand so that we can stay in the dance with him through every step.

What does it mean to go to God for everything? It means going to him for more than just safe travels, hard conversations at work, logistical hangups, financial issues, and your nighttime prayers.

You can and should go to him for those things, too. But you know that you're going to God as a rhythm when you're not just bringing him your major problems but your tiniest burdens, too.

An even greater sign you're in the rhythm of going to God? When you're not just bringing him your major problems and your tiny burdens but your praises, too.

That's what we do with our best friends. We text them first about the hard things and the exciting things. Jesus is your best friend when every sweet moment makes you say, "I praise you," when every bitter moment makes you say, "I need you," and when every still moment makes you say, "I love you."

Imagine how much you would grow in gratitude if you simply whispered, "Thank you, Jesus" whenever you noticed something wonderful about life.

Imagine how much you would grow in peace if every single time an ounce of anxiety rested on your heart, you brought it immediately to Jesus instead of trying to sort it out on your own.

Imagine how much you would grow in intercession if you simply prayed a one-sentence prayer for the people who God brings to your heart.

Do you see the massive difference between the free dance of spiritual choreography and a merely ritualistic approach? So much of the growth that we think would come through major chunks of time invested in new routines would actually come much easier and joyfully if we simply brought Jesus into the twenty-four hours that we already have.

Go to God first thing and for everything. And when you do, you'll find that he always has something powerful to give.



**Going to God first and for everything enables a true friendship with Jesus.**

# 3

## The Rhythms of the Word

## **The Rhythm of Relationship**

**1.** Go to God

## **The Rhythms of the Word**

**2.** Read the Word

**3.** Ingest the Truth

## **The Rhythms of Prayer**

**4.** Pray to God

**5.** Persist in Conversation

## **The Rhythms of Faith**

**6.** Expect the Spirit

**7.** Do What He Says

In my confident and totally-uninformed opinion, there are two types of dancers: people who know how to follow a beat and people who are hopeless. The first group always has some sense of coordination. They can feel the music. The second group can't feel anything except awkwardness. You know who they are because they're the ones who get amped about the cha-cha slide at weddings. They couldn't keep a simple hand-clap on beat if a million dollars was on the line.

When it comes to staying in rhythm with God, every single human starts in that second group. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). That means that no one enters the dance with the Spirit with an intuitive sense of how to keep in step with him. We are all spiritually uncoordinated.

The breakdown of the metaphor is that while the cha-cha slide folks are hopeless in the dance, we are not hopeless in our movement with the Spirit. God is mighty enough to change us, and he is patient enough to teach us through all our tripping and stumbling.

## LEARNING SCRIPTURE RHYTHMS

If God's ways are not our ways, and if we start off terribly uncoordinated in the movements of the Spirit, how do we start to learn his ways? How do we begin to get in beat with his heart?

God coordinates his uncoordinated people through the power of his Word. In the infallible and inspired Scriptures, we learn who God is, how he moves, and what he wants from and for his people. Put simply, reading the Bible is how we get in beat with the Spirit.

Put simply, reading the Bible is how we get in beat with the Spirit.

It starts with reading, but it doesn't end there. If you scan through how the Bible talks about the Bible, you will find that it isn't just a book from which you receive and process information about God. The Scriptures are also a divine dinner that

you are meant to *eat*. Through Spirit-empowered meditation, the Word hits your taste buds, enriching you with the goodness of God; it moves into your belly, satisfying you with the love of God; and ever so slowly, day by day, it spreads into your whole being, transforming you into the image of God.

If you want to move with the Spirit through every moment of the day, it's not enough just to scan through your Bible reading plan. You have to learn how to get the Bible *into you*, so that you have the motivation and stamina to stick with the movement of God.

## RHYTHM #2: READ THE WORD

The second rhythm of spiritual choreography is reading the Word. Along with “pray to God,” this is a practice that is probably most familiar with readers. Christianity 101 says pick up your Bible and read (and that's a good thing). But this familiarity with the practice can make you miss out on the Person, and that's never good.

The Pharisees were familiar with the Bible. No, that's an understatement—they were *obsessed* with the Bible. The problem was that, in their preoccupation with the precepts and narrative-arcs and perplexing questions of the Scriptures, they missed out on the Person of the Scriptures.

The problem was that, in their preoccupation with the precepts and narrative-arcs and perplexing questions of the Scriptures, they missed out on the Person of the Scriptures.

See how Jesus rebukes their misguided zeal:

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*“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have life, yet it is they that witness to me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”*  
(John 5:39)

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They spent nearly all their time reading and thinking about God, and *yet they refused to come to God*. Again, do you see how easy it is to practice the spiritual disciplines and miss out on the Spirit? This is perhaps most dangerous in the realm of Bible-reading, which easily slips into an isolated study session where we lean on our own intellectual chops to learn about the Creator.

Our aim in spiritual choreography is to read the Word in such a way that we *come to Jesus*. This way of reading the Bible is as

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ancient as the book of Acts, since it's how the disciples who were filled with fire at Pentecost began to study the Law, Prophets, Writings, and the apostles' teaching. The church fathers called it *lectio divina*, which simply means "spiritual reading."

I define it as the practice of reading the Bible in the power of the Spirit with the aim to savor the person of Jesus. When Jesus told the Pharisees that they refused to come to him "that they might have life," I think that's what he was getting at: *Don't just read and study and meditate on your own, thinking that you can have life apart from me. Read the Scriptures, and come to me. Study the Scriptures, and savor me. Meditate on the Scriptures, and eat me. I will give you life.*

What follows is nowhere close to a comprehensive framework for how to read the Word. Here, I want to break down a

few points that will specifically help you approach Bible reading as a way of moving with the Spirit:

### 1. Expect a person.

This is the key, and it's what the Pharisees missed. I love how St. Benedict highlights this in his definition of *lectio divina*:

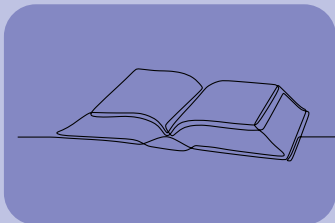
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*"... the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart."*

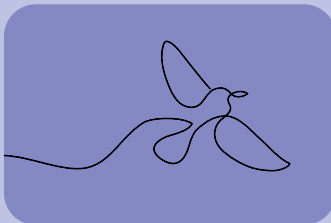
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When you open the Bible, you're not just reading what God said long ago. The Word of God isn't dead; it's living and active (Hebrews 4:12). You are entering into a

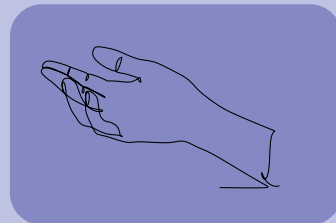
## lectio divina



**Reading the Bible**



**In the Power of the Spirit**



**To Savor Jesus**



holy domain of “intimate dialogue,” in which you expect to hear “the God who is speaking,” and God expects a response from you.

When you grasp this, your daily reading of the Word changes from a casual habit of taking in a book to an intimate experience of encountering a Person. Rising from bed to read the Bible becomes infinitely more alluring when you believe that Jesus is waiting in the living room, ready to change your life.

Rising from bed to read the Bible becomes infinitely more alluring when you believe that Jesus is waiting in the living room, ready to change your life.

## 2. Expect power.

I say “change your life” because that’s what always happens when you read the Bible in the power of the Spirit. You never walk away unchanged. It’s a double-edged sword, which means you don’t walk away from it without a cut—without being sculpted in some way out of the old and into the new (Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 4:24).

This is a principle that has always remained true in my life: whenever I am finding Bible reading boring, it’s a sign that my expectations are far too low. I’m flipping through the pages, but I’m not expecting God to flip my priorities, adjust my affections, shift my direction, and reveal my sin. All in all, I’m not expecting *God*.

## 3. Expect personal application.

The reason that people have a hard time making it through Leviticus isn’t mainly because of its intricate detail. The book of Revelation has a massive amount of detail, too, but that book has no problem capturing our attention. The issue is that we don’t think Leviticus has any relevance in our lives. It feels like it’s talking to someone else who lived 3,000 years ago. When we read Revelation, we might not understand what all of the dragons and creatures and scrolls mean—but we have an immediate sense that it has something to do with us and we should pay attention.

The good news is that, seen rightly in the Spirit, every single bit of Scripture has relevance for our lives. Yes, I’m talking about everything—from that long genealogy at the front of Chronicles to the back half of Daniel (of lion’s den fame) that no one talks about (the vision-of-the-ten-horns part). We can’t see it apart from the Spirit. But when he opens our eyes,

we start to taste the reality of what Paul promises in 1 Timothy 3:

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*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable ...” (v. 16)*

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#### 4. Make a plan.

One very practical note before we move on to the third rhythm of spiritual choreography. When you wake up early to meet with Jesus, you can barely remember your own name—so you don’t need to carry the responsibility of choosing whether to read Jonah, John, or Judges. Because if it takes too much energy to decide what you’re reading for the day, getting back under those warm covers always feels like a much easier decision.

I have always found it helpful and easier to pre-decide what I’m reading for the day with a daily Bible reading plan. The nice thing is that the entire Bible is breathed out by God, so you can’t go wrong. My tried-and-true schedule is the M’Cheyne Bible Reading Plan, which goes through the New Testament and Psalms twice and the Old Testament once every year. If that’s too much for you, take it one book at a time—and break it up into a 30-day reading plan. As long as your plan breaks up the Bible into manageable chunks every day, you’re golden.

This isn’t a necessity. “Thou shalt have a reading plan” is nowhere to be found in Scripture. But the Bible does tell you to “meditate on it day and night,” and sometimes a reading plan helps you do that.

#### RHYTHM #3: INGEST THE TRUTH

Hold up. Go back to that last sentence and reread. Do you notice how high God sets the bar for our relationship with his Word? Just like you won’t find “Thou shalt have a reading plan” in Scripture, you also won’t find “Thou shalt read the Bible once a day.” God wants much more for you than a motivational morning pick-me-up. He wants his breathed-out Word, which he continues to breathe into his Spirit-filled people, to become your oxygen—to fill your soul as often as breath fills your lungs.

For most people, managing to touch God’s Word once a day is a heavy enough task. How can God—or this guide, for that matter—expect people to take on the much greater burden of thinking about the Bible day and night?

The truth is that constant meditation on God’s Word isn’t just a great burden—it’s an impossible task for humans. What moves you from superficial Scripture reading into ongoing meditation isn’t brute discipline; it’s recognizing and responding to the Spirit, who takes on the

burden of moving the Word through your mind moment by moment.

Listen to these words of freedom from our Lord:

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*“But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 16:13)*

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You could summarize the story of the Old Testament in four words: people forget God’s Word. From Adam and Eve, to Moses and Israel, to David and Solomon, to the exiles in Babylon, *God’s people forget*—it’s what we do. God knew this too well, so he began to promise another way of remembrance besides rote memorization:

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*“And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:27)*

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Do you see the power of this better plan? No longer would God expect his people merely to hear and obey on their own. He would provide his own Spirit, who would remind them of what God said *and* empower them to do it.

That’s what Jesus is promising. The better plan that Ezekiel prophesied has

come—we have received the One who reminds us of God’s Word and causes us to walk in it.

You could summarize the story of the Old Testament in four words: people forget God’s Word.

What this means is that day and night meditation is possible. If you’re doing it on your own—no matter how many reminders you set on your phone and verses you write on your hand and hours you spend memorizing—you don’t stand a chance. But if God himself takes on the responsibility of filling you with remembrance, and your job is simply to respond, who can say that it’s impossible for God?

Constant meditation is a lifestyle you grow into over the course of years, not a habit you form overnight. It is the slow journey of submitting to the Spirit, one thought at a time, as he turns your whole way of thinking into the shape of his Scriptures. In the end, everything that passes through your mind becomes branded with the Bible—each thought God-informed, God-molded. Happiness simply happens as you meditate on the

Word and stay planted by streams of mercy (Psalm 1:1).

Constant meditation is a lifestyle you grow into over the course of years, not a habit you form overnight.

What happens, in contrast, when you *don't* ingest the truth? You get spiritually hangry. Think about it: Jesus told us that man does not “live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). So what happens when you eat a few bites of the Word in the morning and then forget it for the rest of the day? The same thing that happens when you try intermittent fasting: you get hangry. Instead of God-shaped thoughts that turn your heart Godward, your thoughts become first self-willed, then self-interested, until at last both your mind and heart are self-consumed.

Ingesting the truth is the rhythm of receiving and responding to the Spirit's constant truth-reminders so that your soul is continually fed with God's Word. Within a life of spiritual choreography, ingesting the truth is like constantly receiving and eating sweet and nutritious snacks from

the Spirit, so that you don't faint in the dance. God's Word is the nutrition (as wholesome as kale, as filling as bread, as sweet as honey) that keeps us walking step by step with him.

With this in mind, let's get practical with four ways you can ingest the truth:

### **1. Journal it.**

Thomas Watson said, “The reason we come away so cold from reading the Word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.” I've found this confirmed again and again in my years of reading the Bible: whenever I just open the Bible, read, and close it without doing *something* to get it in my heart, I walk away largely unaffected—even though I just spent an hour reading the very words of God.

How could this be possible? Because God has designed his Word to be responded to, not merely read. And by taking one simple step to respond, we position our hearts to receive God's Word as it really is—not just information to scan but revelation to savor.

Journaling is the first and most basic step toward responding to the Word—and thereby activating its possibilities in our hearts.

Starting a practice of journaling is simple:

1. Before you read the Bible, talk to God and ask the Spirit to highlight something in Scripture for you to chew on (go to God).
2. Open the Bible and read through your plan and wherever the Spirit takes you, waiting for him to highlight a verse or a passage (read the Bible).
3. When he does, write it down verbatim in a journal, skip a couple of lines, and then start jotting your thoughts around these questions:
  - What does the passage say?
  - What does the passage mean?
  - How does this change my life?

Don't start off trying to write a novel every morning—that's an impossible standard that will discourage you from doing anything the next day. Write a few lines. That's it.

I graduated from seminary, took several courses in hermeneutics and exegesis, and wrote a book on a theology of the Bible—and 90 percent of my knowledge of the Word has come from the Spirit enlightening my heart through the practice of reading and journaling just like this.

## 2. Memorize it.

If you want to follow the Spirit wherever he wants to take you, you need to pack

some food to-go. When you're faint and weary and facing discouragement from the enemy, that's not the moment to say: "Hold up, let me go back home and get into my quiet-time spot and read the Bible to get my mind right on this." It's like a soldier who forgot his weapon asking for the battle to stop so that he can return to base. The flesh and the enemy are going to fight against you while you're on-the-go; will you have God's Word with you so that you can stand?

The way to do this is to memorize Scripture. Unless you naturally enjoy memorizing stuff or you were in a youth/college ministry that emphasized Scripture memory, most believers are intimidated by memorization and insist that they're "not good at it."

The flesh and the enemy are going to fight against you while you're on-the-go; will you have God's Word with you so that you can stand?

But I don't buy it. I once told a group of fourth graders that I would give any one of them a Snickers bar the next day if they came back with 1 Peter 2:1-2 memorized

with 100% accuracy, word for word (don't judge me for bribing them). The next day, they all walked in like holy Bereans after a night of examining the Scriptures to see if these things were so.

Memorizing Scripture has nothing to do with ability and everything to do with incentive. If you believe that it's going to pay off, you'll put in the time. You have to believe that having God's Word in your heart will make life better, or else you won't bother.

You have to believe that having God's Word in your heart will make life better, or else you won't bother.

Besides the stunning biblical promises that memorizing Scripture leads to happiness (Psalm 1:1), prosperity (Psalm 1:3), and success (Joshua 1:8), I can testify that every single time I've invested time in memorizing, it's paid off. Perhaps not at the moment. Memorizing is almost always painful in the moment—you are cognitively stretching, and that's not fun. But later on, you find that the Spirit is multiplying the effort invested and bringing remembrances of Scripture that you didn't even work to memorize.

### 3. Speak it.

Jesus is so gracious that when you ingest the truth, he doesn't just give you a return on your investment. He multiplies it thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold (Matthew 13:8).

The Spirit is constantly doing the work of reminding you of Scripture. So what's your role? Your job is to respond. And biblically, one of the most powerful ways to respond is to let the Word he brings to your heart make its way to your mouth.

Your mouth? This isn't intuitive for modern-day readers, so take a look at what the Lord tells Joshua:

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*"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written within it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8)*

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God puts forth two contrasting routes: either the Book will depart from Joshua's mouth, or he will meditate on it day and night. Why does he say it that way? Because the Hebrew word for meditate gives the sense of chewing on something over and over again (hence *ingest* the truth). We can do this in a very literal way by letting the



Word move through our lips throughout the day.

If you are on your own, then when the Spirit brings Scripture to your mind, you can simply say it out loud, pray it out loud, or start rehearsing it over and over—as if it’s your favorite song. If you are with someone, then it’s likely the Spirit is bringing it to your mind because he wants you to work it into the conversation. Sharing the Word with someone else is one of the most powerful ways to make it stick in your heart.

#### 4. Act it.

But what’s even more powerful is *doing the Word*. You haven’t truly ingested the Word until you have acted upon it. James tells us that if we stare at the Word and then walk away without doing it, we’re like someone who looks in a mirror and then forgets what they look like as soon as they leave (James 1:23). If you don’t do the Word, you will forget the Word. In contrast, if you do the Word, you will remember more and more of the Word. Listen to what Jesus promises:

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*“Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure that you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.” (Mark 4:24)*

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Jesus’ litmus test for the proper hearing of his Word is *using it*. If you use it, Jesus recognizes that you’ve heard rightly, and he’ll give you more.

When the Spirit reminds you of Scripture, will you obey it immediately?

For some, this could introduce a kind of pressure to your Bible reading, where every day you have to journal it, memorize it, and then anxiously look for a way to act it out.

But remember, spiritual choreography is all about freely following the Holy Spirit, moving with him moment by moment in the dance.

Of course, there will be times when your daily time of Bible reading has immediate application for that day—and yes, you should absolutely obey God and act out the Word when that happens. But in the journey with Jesus, acting out the Word is more about obeying the spontaneous promptings of the Spirit moment by moment when he brings Scripture to mind.

What do I mean? Over time, as you ingest the truth by journaling, memorizing, and speaking the Word, you are building up a bank of Scripture that the Spirit will multiply in remembrance in the years to come. At any moment, he can bring a

## SPIRITUAL CHOREOGRAPHY

verse to your heart that has immediate application for something you're thinking, doing, or saying. The question is this: when the Spirit reminds you of Scripture, will you obey it immediately?

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*"When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies. I hasten and do not delay to keep your commands."  
(Psalm 119:59-60)*

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That's what it means to act out the Scripture. As you are freely following the Spirit and he nudges you to the right with a promise that assures, go right; when he nudges you to the left with a command that convicts, go left.

The more you heed the Scripture he sends, the more he will send—until your day is full of sweet and satisfying reminders of the word of God—indeed, until every thought and action is a response to the voice of the Spirit.

RHYTHM 2: READ THE WORD	RHYTHM 3: INGEST THE TRUTH
Expect a person	Journal it
Expect power	Memorize it
Expect personal application	Speak it
Make a plan	Act it



**Reading the Bible helps us learn who God is, how he moves, and what he wants from and for his people.**





# The Rhythms of Prayer

## **The Rhythm of Relationship**

**1.** Go to God

## **The Rhythms of the Word**

**2.** Read the Word

**3.** Ingest the Truth

## **The Rhythms of Prayer**

**4.** Pray to God

**5.** Persist in Conversation

## **The Rhythms of Faith**

**6.** Expect the Spirit

**7.** Do What He Says

Prayer is the most delightful part of the dance. And it's also the part that many Christians dread the most.

When was the last time you heard a Christian say this about their prayer life: "You know what? It's amazing. I am deeply enjoying God. I love my prayer life with Jesus." Almost everyone talks about their prayer life like they talk about their diet: "Yeah, it definitely could get better. I'm just not prioritizing it like I should. Down the road, I'm hopeful it'll get better."

Think about how Paul talked about his prayer life. In his letters, he makes frequent references to praying all the time (e.g., Colossians 1:3), and he plainly expects every other Christian to do the same thing (e.g., Romans 12:12). For Paul, prayer is the farthest thing from dry—he cries, he wrestles, he rejoices, he praises, he gives thanks. And nowhere do we get the impression that Paul considers such a prayer life a spiritual "feat." For him, it's the logical thing to do when you see the beauty of Jesus.

So what makes Paul's prayer life different?

Whereas most believers see prayer as a painstaking responsibility, Paul saw it as a pleasurable response. Yes, Paul told us to pray at all times—but he was clear that this was only possible *in the Spirit* (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18).

More than any method or tactic or acronym, what will transform your prayer life is realizing that your job is to respond to the Spirit praying within you. You're not the leader of your prayer life. You just have to follow him.

This brings prayer, which could be an act of disciplined drudgery, into the realm of a delightful dance, where we are caught up in majestic and eternal communion with the Triune God, praying *in* God the Spirit *to* God the Father *through* God the Son.

If that was too theologian-jargony for you, here's what I mean plain and simple: the difference between the prayer life you have and the prayer life you want is nothing more and nothing less than the presence and leadership of the Spirit of Christ.

In the daylong dance, prayer is where we get to look at our partner face to face—and it is where, keeping our eyes on him, we

stay in step with him as we talk and laugh along the way. Prayer is what changes it from a stoic waltz to a thrilling slow dance with the lover of our souls. No prayer, no romance.

The difference between the prayer life you have and the prayer life you want is nothing more and nothing less than the presence and leadership of the Spirit of Christ.

How can we get started with turning prayer from a responsibility to a response? There are two rhythms of prayer, each connected with a time and place: the first is the rhythm of praying to God, which is the practice of seeking Jesus in secret; and the second is the rhythm of persisting in conversation, which is the practice of maintaining open dialogue with God throughout the day—when you’re around family, with friends, or at work.

#### **RHYTHM #4: PRAY TO GOD**

Jesus told his disciples how to do this. He said, “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father

who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:6).

Are you obeying these plain words from Jesus? Sometimes he spoke in parables, but here, he’s not using metaphor. Literally go into a room (or a closet or a car)—go to a place where no one will see you or hear you or be able to give you religious credit for what you’re doing—and when you’re there, *pray*.

You can’t have intimacy with Jesus if your whole life with Jesus is out in the open. There has to be secret-place time. And by the way, “secret place” means you don’t announce it, post it, or talk about it later. It means you truly believe that there is a God who sees you and that his sight is all that matters.

Your time in the secret-place is the difference-maker that tells you whether you’re a Christian for the social benefits or you’re a Christian because you love Christ. It is the one and only hypocrisy antidote.

It is, in other words, a matter of life and death that you find a place and time to do what Jesus said in Matthew 6:6. So how do you get started?

##### **1. Secure a place.**

The first step is almost ridiculously practical, but if you miss it, it could dramatically hinder your prayer life. Do you have a place where you can talk out loud to God without other people hearing

you? Many Christians' prayer lives have been reduced to wandering "unspokens" and monotonous mumbles simply because they haven't taken the time to find a place where they can shout.

Shout? Yes! You are talking to the God of the Universe. If your prayer life is less emotional than your customer service call to GEICO, you're forgetting who you're talking to and what he is capable of.

Besides, this is the way that Jesus prayed:

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*"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." (Hebrews 5:7)*

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Jesus feared God. He believed that God was really in the room. And he showed it by the way he prayed—with volume and gumption.

Oswald Chambers, the early 20th century Bible teacher, was once sailing on a ship where he couldn't find a place to pray like that. So what did he do? He crawled into a rescue lifeboat on the side of the ship each morning so that he could cry out to his Creator in peace.

You might have to do something like that. Jesus is worth it. If you're a college student packed into a house with eight other people, get in your car. If you're a

dad with young kids who love to chat first thing in the morning, set the alarm 30 minutes before they wake up so you can talk to Jesus first. If you're a mom with toddlers, use the shower as a place to praise Jesus and cry out.

And if all else fails and you can't find a secret-place hour, you can always steal away a secret-place minute. Take one minute to go into your room and shut the door (I know you can do it because you have to do this to go to the bathroom). Talk to Jesus in the secret place for one minute, without anyone knowing about it. Just invest 60 seconds in the secret place, you will walk out of the room with great reward.

## **2. Expect reward.**

That is what changes secret-place prayer from a discipline to a delight. It's what Jesus promised: *"And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

What is this great reward found in the secret place? Of course, there is the reward of answered prayer. But God has something even better for us than that, and the stunning news is that we don't have to wait for it. It's found as soon as we enter.

God's presence is the reward that turns secret-place prayer from a time of drudgery to an experience of unimaginable delight.

Too many of God's children enter into prayer believing that they are throwing up requests to heaven in isolation, with the

hopes that maybe—*someday*—they might have some kind of reward or answered prayer to show for their time. No wonder prayer feels hard. No wonder we don't feel like doing it and then feel guilty about not doing it, which makes us not want to do it even more.

God's presence is the reward that turns secret-place prayer from a time of drudgery to an experience of unimaginable delight.

But what if we are never alone in prayer? What if, every time we shut the door to pray, there is someone waiting inside, ready to talk? This is why I prefer calling this the “secret place” instead of “solitude.” There's someone there. And that “someone” happens to be the Wonderful Counselor, the King of Kings, the Anointed One, whose oils of gladness exceed all of his companions (Hebrews 1:9).

What will make you want to go back to the secret place again and again is believing and experiencing that Jesus is there, ready to bring swift reward to those who steal away time alone with him.

But what if the reward of his presence doesn't feel so swift? What if, despite your believing, it seems as though you're talking upwards into thin air? Good news: Jesus has told you what to do. You have to ask for the Holy Spirit.

### 3. Ask for the Spirit.

Not enough believers are explicitly asking for the Spirit because they assume he's there. The thinking goes that if we pray to God in Jesus' name, then of course, we can assume that we have secured the Spirit's help, whether we have any kind of interaction with him or not.

The issue behind this assumption is that it treats the Spirit as an unconscious force rather than a Person who has come to interact with us.

How do you know whether you have prayed in the power of the Spirit? The same way you know whether you have spent meaningful time with your best friend. You walk away having made a relational exchange—going back and forth with one another's thoughts, feelings, stories, ideas, images, and embraces. The only difference is that the Spirit uniquely makes these exchanges from within, in the depths of our souls.

The Spirit is a Person—a Person who, by the way, made his entrance into the church with a mighty wind and tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-2). He isn't shy. Wherever he

goes, he makes his presence known—and he always leaves the marks of unhindered freedom, inexpressible joy, and expanded affections for Jesus.

What this means for prayer is that the Spirit's partnership is not subconscious—something that's there but we aren't really aware of it. It is deeply experiential (Romans 5:5, 8:16). Praying in the Spirit doesn't mean merely praying on your own and trusting that the Spirit is somehow helping you along. When you pray in the Spirit (and you should always pray in the Spirit—Ephesians 6:18), you can sense in the depths of your soul his leadership, his comfort, and his power.

Praying in the Spirit doesn't mean merely praying on your own and trusting that the Spirit is somehow helping you along.

If you aren't experiencing this in your prayer life, I'm certain that your prayer life is dry. I know this because I've been there. I know that praying in the flesh is a grueling task that requires a great deal of discipline with very little reward. What is absent in this kind of prayer is laughter, freedom,

and levity. What's missing, above all, is the taste of God's love that the Spirit wants to bring (Romans 5:5).

And if you're missing *that*, God isn't indifferent. He deeply wants to bring an inner taste of his affection for you. All you must do is ask:

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*"If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13)*

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There it is, promised by Jesus. He made it simple, because it really is that simple. If we will humble ourselves enough to admit our inability to pray on our own and ask for God to carry us from within, the Father's heart always bursts with overflowing compassion and a readiness to help.

Ask, and he will come. And when he does, you won't just relish the time you get to talk to him in the secret place. You'll never want the conversation to stop.

## **RHYTHM #5: PERSIST IN CONVERSATION**

When prayer changes from a daily ritual to a relational rhythm, you realize that it never has to end. You don't leave Jesus when your quiet time is over. You're in the

dance with his Spirit all day long, looking at him, talking to him, moving with him.

I used to put much more pressure on my morning time of prayer because, deep down, I believed that I needed to get it all out before I left. If that was my one chance to *really* pray that day, and I would have to wait until the next morning to talk to God again, then I needed to make sure that God heard everything that I had to say.

But when I started to learn the power of praying in the Spirit, the pressure of a daily ritual was lifted. I don't mean that I stopped valuing my early-morning prayer in the secret place. Quite the opposite—with the pressure removed, I enjoyed it so much that I never wanted it to stop. Whereas I once hung up the phone at the end of my devotional time, I just kept talking to the Spirit while I walked out of the living room and into the kitchen to make breakfast. Before, I would bookmark points of prayer for later conversation ("I should pray about that"), but slowly I started to learn that it was much better to bring everything immediately to God ("Jesus, let's talk about that").

Though this might seem like a stretch, it's actually the biblical standard for how Spirit-filled children are meant to interact with God. Paul said it again and again: "Rejoice in the Lord always; *pray without ceasing* ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17) and "Rejoice always; *be constant in*

*prayer* ..." (Romans 12:12). That's what we're supposed to do.

But how? The apostolic expectation appears out of reach until you read Ephesians 6:18 and see *how* we are supposed to do it. "... pray at all times *in the Spirit*."

Again, if constant prayer is your responsibility to carry, it's impossible. But if it is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to stir you into communion with God, and your job is to *respond*, then of course, God is able to keep us talking to him.

And yet, while the Spirit is the leader of the dance, you really do have a role to play. Here are three ways to sow into a life of unending conversation with God:

### **1. Turn pains and praises into prayers.**

The human heart is so burdened in a fallen world that if we merely brought every anxious thought, painful memory, fearful projection, relational wound, and taxing stress straight to Jesus instead of trying to deal with it ourselves, our prayer lives would blossom. Pains become prompts to pray when you believe Jesus is ready to help. He's not too lofty to resolve that tiff with your friend. He's not too holy to help you breathe in traffic. He's not too busy to rescue you from boredom at work. The One who became a baby and drew a line in the dirt and embraced a thorny crown has proven that he's ready to come down



to the difficult realities of earthly living and give *help*.

But you have to ask for it. Paul says that the habit of automatically asking for help is the difference between a life marked by anxiety and a life marked by peace:

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*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)*

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Unending prayer starts with bringing every pain to the Physician. But it doesn’t end there. Should we talk to Jesus when things are hard and leave him out of the party when things are going well? If you do that, you’ll have a yo-yo prayer life that is active in agony and absent in abundance. In that case, God isn’t your friend, your love, your daily dance partner. He’s your cosmic AAA whom you call when there’s a flat tire and then forget the rest of the time.

Cultivate friendship with Jesus by letting every good thing remind you to pray. Get in the habit of saying out loud, “Thank you Jesus” whenever you see a red sun setting, a child chuckling, a filet mignon sizzling, and a Red Sea parting.

But be warned: if you do this—if you constantly acknowledge the name of Jesus—people might find out that you’re a Christian and start asking questions. You might have to admit that who you are is all because of who he is. And you just might have to invite them into the dance.

But be warned: if you do this—  
if you constantly acknowledge  
the name of Jesus—people  
might find out that you’re  
a Christian and start  
asking questions.

## 2. Respond to every prompting.

Besides pains and praises, there are promptings from the Holy Spirit that can’t be put into clear buckets. Paul tells us that the Spirit is constantly interceding for us in our weakness—and that this often produces “groanings” that are too deep for words (Romans 8:26).

In my walk with the Spirit, I have found that these promptings begin with soft breezes on the heart. Jesus is mighty, but he’s not forceful. He’s the meekest King. So he will never yank us into prayer; instead, he gives gentle tugs that lend an invitation.

Constant prayer happens when we say “Yes” to every one of these invitations. The more you follow the soft breezes, the more they pick up wind and turn into undeniable gusts. When the Spirit trusts that you are a responsive dance partner, he knows you can take you on swifter spins, wider leaps, and riskier dips.

When you feel the slightest intuition to pray, obey it. But to do that, you have to develop one final habit.

### 3. Pray now, not later.

If you are meant to pray at all times, then the time to pray is always now and never later. I believe that countless prayer lives have been ruined and rendered totally ineffectual with the lie that *prayer can happen later*.

- This isn’t a good morning prayer time. I’m not feeling it. I’ll try again later this afternoon.
- The kids are tired, and we are, too. Let’s pray for them tomorrow.
- Thanks for sharing that with me. I’ll be praying for you (at some

undefined, typically-nonexistent point in the future).

The devil loves when Christians pray later. Because a resolve to pray isn’t actually prayer—it’s a deceptive replacement, a decision to postpone talking to Jesus instead of bringing everything to him, moment by moment.

The devil loves when  
Christians pray later.

Turn the enemy’s suggestion to “pray later” into a cue to *pray now*. Whenever you feel the slightest sense that you should pray (which will often come with the thought that “you could do it later”), decide to pray right then and there.

Go to God with everything. Read the Word and ingest it day and night. Pray to God and persist in unending conversation with him. When you do that, the Spirit introduces surprise after surprise into life. And to follow him into those, you’re going to need faith.



**Your prayer life is transformed when you realize that your job is to respond to the Spirit praying within you.**

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# **The Rhythms of Faith**

## **The Rhythm of Relationship**

**1.** Go to God

## **The Rhythms of the Word**

**2.** Read the Word

**3.** Ingest the Truth

## **The Rhythms of Prayer**

**4.** Pray to God

**5.** Persist in Conversation

## **The Rhythms of Faith**

**6.** Expect the Spirit

**7.** Do What He Says

What moved Jesus' heart more than anything else? When people believed that he was going to move. When the Canaanite woman humbled herself to the point of a dog, believing he could heal her demon-possessed daughter, Jesus rejoiced (Mark 7:28-30). When the Centurion believed Jesus could heal his servant with one word from afar, Jesus marveled (Luke 7:9). When the paralytic's friends tore off the roof for a miracle, Jesus noticed (Mark 2:5).

Wherever Jesus walked into a town where faith was abundant, abundant miracles followed. But what stiffened the flow of healing power more than anything else was a lack of faith:

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*"He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."  
(Matthew 13:58)*

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Jesus, who can do all things, did not do miracles there because of their unbelief. Why? Because Jesus has chosen to pour himself out where there are vessels of faith.

Wherever unbelief lies, there isn't any room for him.

That's what unbelief does. It confines the uncontainable God—not by reducing his power (which is impossible) but by limiting the potential places where his power can take you.

What moved Jesus' heart more than anything else?  
When people believed that he was going to move.

Unbelief makes us stiff in the dance with God. When we straighten our legs and clench our hands and tighten our chest with our own conception of what God can and cannot do, the Spirit is unable to move us with freedom and flow.

The rhythm of relationship (#1: go to God) is what brings us to the dance floor with God. The rhythms of the Word (#2: read the Word; #3: ingest the truth) teach us how the Leader moves and strengthen

us to follow. The rhythms of prayer (#4: pray to God; #5: persist in conversation) turn our gaze toward the partner and spark friendly delight into the dance.

But what is perhaps most exciting about the dance are the unexpected places the Great Choreographer will lead us—if we will practice the rhythms of faith and follow.

### **RHYTHM #6: EXPECT THE SPIRIT**

Dancing with Jesus is never boring. I remember in the first grade, we sang a song called “Good Morning to You.” In the first week of school, we learned a set of hand motions to the song—the most complex of which involved lifting your hands in the air and moving them back and forth. If Mrs. Madara was feeling a little crazy, we might have added an extra hand clap once or twice.

I had the hand motions down by day two. For what seemed like the next five million days, we played the same song again and again, with the same simple hand motions. As an eight year old, I remember dreading this “good morning” ritual. Dancing on autopilot day after day is never fun.

And this is exactly how many Christians perceive their walk with Jesus. When they were a child, they learned the hand motions—read your Bible, pray, be kind, don’t lie, and don’t get drunk. Pretty soon,

with some practice, they got the hand motions down. And then, for the rest of their life, they dance on autopilot. They generally know what to expect. They’ll have some time with Jesus, and then go out and live their life with some basic motions in mind. Maybe—just maybe—God might throw an unexpected hand clap of surprise every so often. But the expectation is that there is nothing new to expect.

What changes everything is going from hand-motions Christianity to actually learning how to dance with the Person of Christ. When he’s guiding you, you can’t be on autopilot. When he’s leading you, you have something new to learn every single day. When he’s moving you, you never know what to expect.

Have you been on autopilot? Have you been bored with the hand motions you memorized long ago? The one shift that will snap you out of the motions and into the movement of the Spirit is starting to expect something of God.

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*“Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”  
(Hebrews 11:6)*

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Jesus is pleased, not only when we seek him, but when we follow him, believing

that there are unexpected opportunities, thrilling turns, and surprising treasures along the way.

The disciples experienced this as soon as Jesus sent the Spirit. No longer did they have to rely on the rote hand-motions of the Old Covenant. Now they had a dynamic partner, an indwelling Person, who could lead them step by step.

Jesus is pleased, not only when we seek him, but when we follow him, believing that there are unexpected opportunities, thrilling turns, and surprising treasures along the way.

And indeed, the Spirit soon showed that he was dynamic. He was unexpected. He came with a bang, resting on his people with tongues of fire (Acts 2:1-2). He brought thousands into the church at the first preaching event (Acts 2:41), and then proceeded to kill off two of its leaders for lying to him (Acts 5:1-11). He brought Philip to a fruitful place of ministry (Acts 8:4-8), only to send him off to a desert to speak to a single eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). Without explanation, he forbade Paul and

Silas from going to a couple of cities with great opportunity, only to lead them to a city where they would be arrested (Acts 16:6-24). He filled one of Jesus' greatest enemies to make him one of Jesus' greatest apostles (Acts 9:1-31), and then took him on a journey around the world in the hands of a Roman guard (Acts 25-28).

Study the ways of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, and you will quickly conclude that his ways cannot be predicted.

Though it is delightful to read about these grand adventures of the Spirit in the book of Acts, what is even more exciting is that we have the same Spirit leading us today (Hebrews 13:8).

Do you believe that? Do you go through your daily life believing that you generally know what to expect? Or do you enter in with great expectation, believing that the Spirit of Jesus is as unpredictable as he was in the past, as active as he was with the apostles?

The rhythm of expecting the Spirit is very simply the practice of maintaining a holy anticipation of what he will do at any moment. It's the habit of keeping our limbs loose in the dance, eager and ready for him to take us on a swing.

I have found that when I enter life joyfully loose, the Spirit indeed takes me on turns that I would have never asked for or anticipated. In my dance with the Spirit, he has led me to surprising experiences of

glory, heavy confrontations with darkness, awkward encounters with strangers, new revelations of sin, and unforeseen tastes of love. With a partner like him, I'm never bored in the dance.

Are you obeying what God has already said?

### **RHYTHM #7: DO WHAT HE SAYS**

Spiritual choreography rests and falls on this rhythm. Jesus will not be your dance consultant. He will not chip in. He will not resort to making suggestions while you plug your ears and do your own dance. If you want to dance with Jesus, he has to be your Choreographer, your Master, your Lord (Luke 6:46).

There are two main sets of directions that Jesus will give you in the dance, which you must heed if you want to keep in step with him.

First, there are righteous directions. You can see these as the standard, unbending principles that he always moves by and never moves outside of.

Second, there are relational directions. Within his fixed principles, these are the flexible twists and turns that he has designed specifically for the dance with you.

Understanding both of these directions (and not neglecting one or the other) is crucial for staying in step with the Spirit.

### **RIGHTEOUS DIRECTIONS**

Don't seek a specific set of directions in the dance if you aren't already heeding the fundamentals. Imagine a pupil showing up for her sixth lesson and telling the coach that, despite ignoring the coach's first five lessons, she would like him to give her some new tips. The coach would appropriately tell her that if she won't follow what he's already said, then he won't give her anything new.

Are you obeying what God has already said? In the Scriptures, God has laid out his eternal decrees that don't change from era to era. Once and for all, he has written out his moral will—and he hasn't changed his mind. These are the fundamentals of spiritual choreography. If you're not in step with these directions, you're in an entirely different dance.

This might sound harsh, but when we're talking about following the Spirit, it is absolutely crucial to understand that he will never contradict the word he has already spoken. He's not going to give special directions to those who are disregarding his scriptural directions.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,



gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). It's how he moves. And this means that if you're harboring bitterness, living like Scrooge, swirling in anxiety, seething with anger, shooting out insults, relishing evil, indulging in pornography, and getting high on the weekends, you're out of step with him.

On the positive side, if you reread that list, the righteous movement that the Spirit wants to lead you into sounds like a life anyone would want. Do you want to genuinely care for people? Do you want to ooze happiness? How about a heart that's content? Do you want to leave a mark of gentleness and generosity on the people around you? Do you want to truly savor the best things in life and keep enjoying the good gifts of the world in their proper place? Then dance with the Spirit. That's what righteousness looks like.

## RELATIONAL DIRECTIONS

But it doesn't stop there. The Spirit has more for you than the righteous fundamentals that guide his dance with every soul. He has specific moves just for you—prepared in his choreographic plan formed from the foundation of the world.

These unique moves never contradict his righteous directions. He'll never take you out of step with something he's said in his Word. Instead, these relational

directions—the moves he's made just for you—*specify* how he wants you to walk in righteousness throughout the day.

Relational directions specify how God wants you to walk in righteousness throughout the day.

For example, you can know for certain that the Spirit is going to call you to love people today (1 Corinthians 14:1a). That's his righteous direction. His relational directions will show you the specific instances, places, people, and ways he wants you to love today (1 Corinthians 14:1b).

You can know for certain that the Spirit is going to call you to walk in holiness today (1 Peter 1:14-16). That's his righteous direction. His relational directions will show you what it means for *you* to be holy—and hint, it might mean enjoying things that other Christians don't have the freedom to enjoy and staying away from things that other Christians are able to participate in (Romans 14:22-23).

One more example: you can know for certain that the Spirit is going to call you to do good works today (Titus 3:14). That's his righteous direction. His relational directions will show you the

## THE RHYTHMS OF FAITH

specific good works that he has prepared for you, according to your spiritual gifts, your circumstances, and your season of life (Ephesians 2:10).

Remember, Jesus is not a coach who gives you the fundamentals of the dance and then pushes you out on the floor to do it alone. He dances with you—moving, of course, in perfect righteousness, but also

with specific twists and turns and nudges that he’s reserved just for you. These unique moves are his relational directions (how the Spirit wants you to walk in righteousness)—and following them is one of the main differences between “hand-motions faith” and experiencing the thrill of the dance.

RIGHTEOUS DIRECTIONS	RELATIONAL DIRECTIONS
<p><b>God calls you to love one another.</b> (1 Corinthians 14:1a)</p>	<p><b>God shows you specific people and ways he wants you to love today.</b> (1 Corinthians 14:1b)</p>
<p><b>God calls you to walk in holiness today.</b> (1 Peter 1:14-16)</p>	<p><b>God shows you what it means for you to be holy, which might look different from what he shows other believers.</b> (Romans 14:22-23)</p>
<p><b>God calls you to do good works today.</b> (Titus 3:14)</p>	<p><b>God shows you specific good works for you to do, according to your spiritual gifts, circumstances, and season of life.</b> (Ephesians 2:10)</p>



**Unbelief makes us stiff, but faith gives space for the Spirit to move in our lives and for us to follow his lead.**



# Stepping into a Way of Life

It's easy to cross off a checklist. It's much harder to cultivate a new way of life that is never marked "Complete."

The promise of this guide wasn't that you can learn how to follow the Spirit in five minutes a day. The time-commitment requirement is on the opposite extreme: you can and should follow the Spirit every minute of the day.

We've walked through seven rhythms that will teach you how to move with the Spirit in every moment. Here, I want to briefly walk through five encouragements to help you put this all together so that you (and hopefully your community, too) can enter the daylong dance with the Spirit.

## 1. RECLINE

If you're just getting started in your walk with Jesus, start with the secret place. Before you walk out in the open with Jesus, recline with him in private. This is where the greatest reward is found—and neglecting it is one of the surest ways toward a superficial faith.

Practice the rhythms first in private. Form the habit of going to God first thing in the morning. This means that go-to substitutes that especially call your name as soon as you wake up should be put aside—at least until you get to see Jesus first. Pick a reading plan that breaks the Bible up into small bits every day but takes you through the whole book in a year. Before you read, ask the Spirit to make a passage jump off the page, expect him to do it, and then write it down when he does. Write about it for a little while, and let that time of ingesting the truth prepare your heart to pray. Then, pray. Follow the Spirit's lead as he shows you the pleasures of the throne of grace (note: if you're brand new to this and haven't prayed alone and out loud for more than 5 minutes, [pick up our free 3 to 30 Program](#)).

## 2. REJOICE

Rejoice in Jesus *now* (Philippians 4:4). Already, before you've perfected the dance, he has chosen you (1 Peter 2:9). He delights in you (Psalm 147:11). Through

his obedience and sacrifice, he has clothed you in a white garment of righteousness that will one day make you look perfect for the eternal dance (Isaiah 1:18).

This is a dance, not a chase. It's a daily celebration of the peace that Christ has already secured (Romans 5:1). You're already close. Now you get to learn how to move with him at every moment.

### 3. RESPOND

The essence of spiritual choreography is moving from self-initiated daily rituals to a moment-by-moment response to what the Father is doing and where the Spirit is moving. If you grasp this, you're well on

your way toward a major shift that releases the freedom and joy of Christ into your daily walk.

Every morning, ask: "Father, what are you doing today?" Every moment, ask: "Spirit, where are you going now?" And every time you hear a reply, respond: "How can I come?" Then follow the Leader. He'll teach you.

### 4. REPENT

Falling on your face and then getting back into the dance isn't a move outside of spiritual choreography—it is an essential part of growing in it (1 John 1:5-10).

## Five Encouragements to Keep You in the Dance

1	<b>Recline:</b> Meet with Jesus in private.
2	<b>Rejoice:</b> Jesus has chosen you!
3	<b>Respond:</b> Move where God leads.
4	<b>Repent:</b> Go back to God after you fall.
5	<b>Repeat:</b> Dance until Jesus returns!

You will never get every step right until you see Jesus face to face (1 John 3:1-3). Growing in spiritual choreography means going back to God and getting back in the dance faster and faster every time you fall. Delayed repentance hinders your progress. Swift repentance hastens it.

Jesus expects you to fall. He already prepared for it on the cross. And he's eager to teach you with endless patience how to stay on your feet. Believe that, and you won't drift out of the dance the next time you stumble.

## 5. REPEAT

The saints who have learned how to move with the Spirit with seamless grace have put in the work day after day, month after month, and year after year to practice the rhythms, respond to God, fall on their face,


reenter the dance, and then do it all over again. There is no shortcut. It's an endless cycle of abiding, learning, stumbling, and repenting.

It's endless, but never monotonous. You get to experience surprises, thrills, twists, and turns in the dance with Jesus. But more than anything, you get *Jesus*—in whose presence there are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

Don't expect to master the dance in a day. And don't underestimate what the Master can do, one day at a time, as you dance with him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Very soon, the song of waiting will turn to an unimaginable banquet of celebration, where every son and daughter on the floor will rest from the movement and feast with their Maker (Revelation 19:6-9). Until then, we dance.

### **Do you have questions or other topics you wish were covered in the realm of spiritual disciplines?**

All LiveFull's guides are living documents, updated and revised based on reader feedback. [Send us your question or appendix request](#),  and we may include it in the next version of this guide.



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