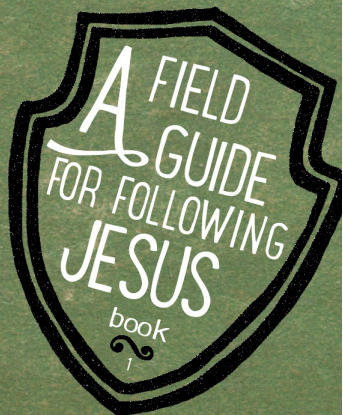


Why DOES
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50 PRACTICAL WAYS
TO GET CLOSER TO GOD



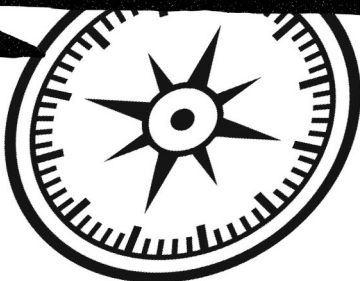
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WHY DOES GOD FEEL SO DISTANT?

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A FIELD GUIDE FOR FOLLOWING JESUS
BOOK 1

CHARLIE MILLER



Why Does God Feel So Distant?
50 Practical Ways To Get Closer To God

A Field Guide for Following Jesus — Book 1

By Charlie Miller

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To my wife, Kim.

Thanks for encouraging me to take risks and pursue dreams.

I thank God for you every day.

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INTRODUCTION

For years I have searched for a book, or series of books, that practically approaches spiritual growth in the average Christian's daily life. When Donald S. Whitney's *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* was recommended to me in March of 2021, I was immediately struck by how directly it cut to the core issues of Christian faith. I heartily recommend his book to anyone who wants to grow in their faith without getting bogged down by legalistic lists of dos and don'ts. Whitney asks that Christians reflect on the fruits of their faith without resorting to the kind of quick hacks and perfect routines that come at us from all sides in our social media world. Jesus may have summarized the gospel with two commands, but we Christians don't have a great track record of successfully implementing them. Seriously, if

you're coming to this book before *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, go read that one first — you can come back to this one when you're finished!

The idea for this book series grew as I started leading my own congregation through Whitney's ten questions. Based on his insightful work, I developed a tool that would help our church members begin assessing how they were doing with each foundational block of the Christian walk. The Personal Spiritual Assessment considers each of Whitney's ten questions with ten personal reflections. Congregants took time to thoughtfully read, pray, and meditate on each statement before giving themselves a numeric score. They added up the scores for each of the statements, which allowed them to objectively identify areas of their faith that presented opportunities for growth. These folks then decided on one or two specific areas of their faith to emphasize over the next several months.

This assessment worked well, but it presented a new challenge: once someone understood which areas of their faith they could focus on for spiritual growth, what next? What work could they do to *actually* grow in that area? Whitney's book wonderfully asks and explains the ten questions, and the Personal Spiritual Assessment provides key focus and direction for growth — all that is left is to actually take a step! A Christian who wants to grow in their

faith must begin doing specific, actionable things. A mind that understands spiritual growth and a heart that desires it are essential at the trailhead, but actions are necessary to bring that understanding and desire into the daily walk of real life. This book — and the entire series — is the answer to that need.

In chapter one you will find a brief description of what it means to desire a closer relationship with God and why that matters for followers of Jesus. If this book tackles the “how,” the first chapter is the “why.” Again, I strongly recommend Whitney’s book for a longer discussion of this topic.

Chapter two introduces the portion of the Personal Spiritual Assessment addressing the question, “Do I want to get closer to God?” This will give you an opportunity to assess for yourself whether a genuine desire for God is a strength of your walk or whether it is an area that presents an opportunity for further growth. This assessment is meant to be taken before you dive into the action steps suggested in the rest of the book. By taking the assessment up front, you can start with an honest idea of how you answer the first question. Whether or not you find the strategies in this book helpful, I strongly recommend that you come back and repeat the assessment in several months, or even in a few years, to see what progress you

have made. If you would prefer to have the full assessment available to take at once, you can find a copy of the complete Personal Spiritual Assessment here:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/personal-spiritual-assessment>

Chapters three through nine are the real heart and purpose of this book. This is where you will find 50 practical ways to get closer to God and feel Him in your life. Some of these will be things you have thought of before, and others might feel totally new. Some of the suggestions will resonate with you, and others will probably leave you feeling “Meh.” Some will challenge you, others will be no big deal. This is by design! I have not included 50 practices with the hope that you find time for all of them. Rather, I have included 50 practices with the belief that there are a *few* here for *everyone* to incorporate into their daily rhythms. You will notice that some of these ideas will sound similar in action, but each of them is different in its focus. Don’t be afraid to try something that is out of your comfort zone. Allow God to stretch you. But most importantly, find the ones that work for you.

Finally, chapter ten is a collection of resources related to growing closer to God. In it you will find a number of books, devotions, blogs, sermons, videos, and other helpful tools to reference as you walk down this path of personal

spiritual growth. There is no “one thing” that is right for everyone, and we are not looking for quick shortcuts to our spiritual growth. Quick faith is usually shallow faith. We want to pursue a faith that is deep, grounded, and well rooted. That is the kind of faith that will stand when life is hard, when days are challenging, and when God doesn’t seem so near.

Thank you for investing your time, energy, and money in this book. My prayer is that you will find it useful as you seek to become more like Jesus, and that you will work each day, in big and small ways, to strengthen your faith. I welcome your feedback, and I would love to hear about your own faith journey — please get in touch via email at charlie@heychurchmedia.com. May the love of God the Father, the guiding of the Holy Spirit, and the peace of Jesus Christ be with you.

ONE

WHY DOES BEING CLOSER TO GOD MATTER?

Cultivating a desire to know God and feel Him more closely – to simply have Him in our life – is central to the growth and maturity of any Christian. Christians believe God works in and through our lives. However, Scripture makes it clear He does not force Himself upon those who do not have a desire to know or follow Him.

In fact, a strong argument can be made that every other area of spiritual health and development is dependent upon our desire to know God. Without such a desire, why would we care what His divine word says to us? What will motivate us to love those around us who may be very difficult to love? What difference will it make to us whether we are pulled deeper into our sin or whether we turn away

from it? Who else will give us the ability to forgive those who have hurt or abandoned us?

As I shared in the introduction, Donald S. Whitney's *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* is a powerful work which I highly recommend. In it, he discusses our need to desire God more deeply before asking, "Do you thirst for God?" That is a tremendously important question! I encourage you to read and digest Whitney's book to gain a deeper understanding of why it is so important.

Here, I will share with you 50 practical, specific, actionable ideas for increasing your desire for God. These are ideas that — if taken seriously — can help you grow closer to God than you feel right now. My prayer is that you will drink from these ideas deeply, chew on them thoughtfully, season them with your prayers, and use them to fuel your daily life.

TWO

HOW DO I KNOW HOW I'M DOING?

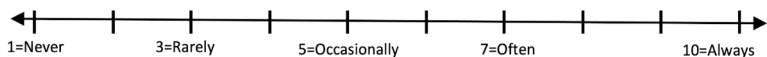
When we are trying to understand our spiritual development, it can be difficult to accurately assess ourselves in a healthy manner. We sometimes fall into the legalistic trap of “checking boxes” to see if we are doing enough, which can leave us burned out as we try to cram spiritual activities into our already overfilled lives. Certainly this is neither helpful nor healthy.

An alternative approach is to self-evaluate by briefly comparing moments and patterns from our own lives to what we know of others’ relationships with God. “I think about God pretty often,” I might think, “especially compared to others who never give God a second thought — I’m doing well!” Unfortunately, this method of evaluation is usually inaccurate, and in some cases it is

downright deceptive. We tend to overinflate our own thoughts about ourselves, and we consider our intentions as if they are concrete actions that have already become reality (or soon will). Conversely, we observe the actions of others and believe we can clearly discern their intent and motives based solely on what we see them do or say. As a result, we end up making assumptions about others we would never want them making about us. These tendencies can lead us to believe we are further along in our spiritual growth than those around us, as we compare our intentions to their actions. We then remain in the developmental stages of our spiritual life rather than taking intentional steps of growth that, after many years, lead to greater maturity in the faith.

This chapter presents a way for you to evaluate yourself honestly and critically. By doing so, you can clearly see if this area of spiritual development — desiring a close relationship with God — is an opportunity for spiritual growth or if it is already an area of significant strength for you in your walk with Jesus.

For this personal assessment, you will use a 10-point scale like the one shown on the next page.



Using this scale, you will read through 10 statements that are related to this particular area of spiritual health and development. Take your time with each statement. Think through examples you can recall from your life. Since you are trying to evaluate your current spiritual condition, focus on more recent responses to the statement rather than ones that might have been accurate years ago but are less reflective of your current faith experience.

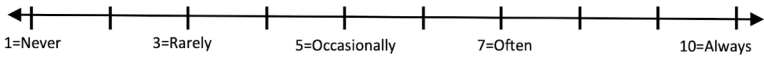
As you work your way through the list of statements, make a note of the numeric rating you give yourself for each of them. Write them down in a notebook or a notes app on your phone or other device.

This book is focused on a single aspect of spiritual growth — growing closer to God by increasing your desire for Him — so the statements in this chapter only cover that portion of the assessment. If you would prefer to take the complete Personal Spiritual Assessment — which includes one hundred evaluation statements across ten important areas of spiritual health and growth — you can download and print a copy here:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/personal-spiritual-assessment>

Whether you choose to download the full assessment or use the one below for this single area of spiritual health and growth, you are now ready to take your Personal Spiritual Assessment. I encourage you to get your favorite beverage, find a comfortable place to sit where you can concentrate without distractions, and begin working through the assessment statements. Remember —this assessment will be most helpful if you are thoughtful and sincere. Try your best to be accurate and honest as you score each statement, thinking about how you are really doing — not about how you wish you were doing or how you want anyone else to perceive you are doing. This is between you and God. The beautiful part is that — no matter what the results show — you will have a much more accurate picture of how deeply you desire God in your life. By knowing this, you will be able to move forward in your faith journey with clarity, purpose, and intentionality.

Please write down your answer to each of the statements below on a scale of 1-10, using the following guide:



Remember to take your time. Think carefully about each question, then evaluate yourself as truthfully as possible using the 1-10 numeric scale.

___ 1. I think about God's greatness in His creation.

___ 2. I reflect on God's goodness in my life despite my circumstances.

___ 3. I acknowledge and express my desperate need for Jesus.

___ 4. I desire to read God's Word to know Him more deeply.

___ 5. I meditate thoughtfully on God's Word.

___ 6. I see God at work in the world around me.

___ 7. I love to communicate with God.

___ 8. I actively seek to include God in all my decisions and actions.

___ 9. I think about the consequences of my disobedience to God and seek His forgiveness and restoration.

___ 10. I long to worship God and be with His people.

When you have given yourself an assessment score for all 10 statements, add the scores together and write the total down.

Total Score: _____

Now that you have your assessment score, you can use the following evaluation scale to determine whether this specific area of spiritual health is an opportunity for growth for you.

If your score is in the range of 10 – 39: This is definitely an area of spiritual growth that needs attention and focus. Consider making the commitment to spend the next 6-12 months being intentional in your efforts to grow this area of your spiritual walk. A great place to start is by working through the list in the following chapters. Pick one of the practical suggestions and put it into practice this week. Then pick another one each week for the next several months. Over time, as you do these things, you will find yourself growing in your desire to know God more deeply. Ideally, you will return to this assessment in 6-12 months and score yourself again to see how you are making progress in this area of your life. Eventually you will want to look at one of the other nine areas of spiritual health to see where other opportunities for growth and development might be.

If your score is in the range of 40 – 69: This is not an area of urgent need for you, but it would be wise to consider how you might promote further growth. You might want to look through the list of ideas in the following chapters and find ones that might help to stretch you in ways which might not be the most comfortable for you. Choose a few specific ideas, then begin working them into your weekly routine one at a time. I would suggest you spend 3-6 months doing so, then return to the assessment and score yourself again. Do you see an increase in your overall score? Do you notice a particular statement that seems to be challenging for you? That might give you an idea of a specific way to grow and increase your desire to know God more deeply.

If your score is in the range of 70 – 99: This area of spiritual health is most likely a key strength for you in your Christian walk. That is wonderful and is truly a cause for celebration. It would not hurt you in any way to go through the list of suggestions in the following chapters and look for the ideas that strike you as the most interesting and/or challenging, then work at putting them into practice. It would be helpful to pick up a copy of the full Personal Spiritual Assessment from our website and take time to work through it in its entirety. This will allow you to see which areas of your spiritual health might provide more immediate opportunities for growth and development.

If your total Personal Spiritual Assessment score is 100:

It is most likely that you have either not been honest with yourself, or you have a highly inflated opinion of your own spiritual development. I would gently admonish you to toss out your results. Humbly ask God to open your heart and eyes to what He would say to you, and then start over with the assessment from the beginning.

You've completed your self-assessment, and now you're looking for some for practical ways to grow closer to God and develop a deeper desire for Him. Grouped into seven helpful categories, the following chapters contain 50 specific ways you can grow closer to God. Let your journey begin!

THREE

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

Each of the ideas in this chapter are centered around prayer. If you haven't developed the habit of prayer yet, a simple (and accurate!) definition is talking to and listening to God. Prayer can be done by speaking out loud, and it can be done silently in your mind. You can pray when you're by yourself, and you can pray together with others. You can also pray by yourself when you're surrounded by other people – but you may want to do so silently if you're not comfortable with odd looks from others. The bottom line is prayer can be done anywhere and anytime.

The single most important thing you can do to develop a meaningful prayer life is, frankly, to pray. This sounds so simplistic, yet it's the key to the whole experience. The more you pray, the more comfortable you'll feel about

praying. The more you pray, the more you'll feel and appreciate the power of prayer. The more you pray, the more you will want to pray. Whether you're a seasoned prayer warrior or a new Christian who has yet to pray at all, the following suggestions will help you in your quest to grow closer to God.

1. Spend one week praying a different Psalm verse each day.

The Psalms are wonderful prayer prompts because they often express the very emotions we feel but find difficult to articulate. The Psalms are full of pleading and crying out to God, and that makes them perfect for us to pray ourselves when we feel the desire to cry out to God. Some beautiful examples that will get you started include the following passages:

- *My soul thirsts for you. My body longs for you in a dry, parched land where there is no water.* - Psalm 63:1
- *My soul longs and yearns for the Lord's courtyards. My whole body shouts for joy to the living God.* - Psalm 84:2
- *My soul is overwhelmed with endless longing for your regulations... My soul is weak from waiting for you to save me. My hope is based on your word.* - Psalm 119:20, 81

- *I stretch out my hands to you in prayer. Like parched land, my soul thirsts for you.* - Psalm 143:6

2. Pray to God and ask Him to give you a passionate faith for Him and His Ways.

Many people long for a passionate faith, yet never think to simply ask God to help them have such faith. Scripture teaches us that whatever we ask for in the name of Jesus will be given to us. The trick for most of us is understanding what it means to ask, “in the name of Jesus.” This simply means to ask as if Jesus were asking. It implies we will be asking for things that would please Jesus, that He himself would ask for. Unfortunately, we often ask for things that will make our life easier. But God wants us to have a faith that seeks after Him — so what better than to ask Him to give us that very faith? Be aware, though, it’s not likely God will simply zap us and fill our heart with overwhelming faith that wasn’t present just a moment earlier. Faith is most often cultivated through learning to trust God, and that requires situations and circumstances that are challenging, uncomfortable, and even sometimes painful for us as we walk through them. The faith growth comes through this process, and there is seldom a shortcut we can take. When we pray for passion for God, we should be prepared to go through things that will cause us to long for Him

more. That's not a bad thing, but it's usually not an easy thing.

3. Pray to God and ask Him to give you one person to show His love to today.

Often, a loss of longing for God is accompanied by an increased obsession with self. The more our eyes are focused on ourselves, the less our eyes can focus on God. A good remedy to the problem of “me” is to begin looking out for others who need to know that God loves them too. As you ask God to help you see others who need to see His love, you'll find your attention turning back to Him and His love for both them and you. Showing God's love can be as simple as offering a smile or a friendly conversation, but it can often lead to the discovery of other unseen needs you can help with. When you demonstrate God's love to others, it puts you in the position of being a conduit — a channel through which God's love flows from Him through you to them. Sharing His love blesses them, but it also blesses you.

4. Pray to God and ask Him to let you reflect His Glory to those you encounter today.

How have you seen God's glory in your life? Perhaps it has been through His generous blessings in areas like your health, your family, your friendships, or your finances. Perhaps it has been through His steadfast presence through

both your best days and your worst days. Maybe you have seen His glory reflected in the beauty of His creation all around you. Or maybe you have seen it His faithfulness to consistently deliver on the promises He has made in His word. However you have seen His glory in your life, ask yourself how you can reflect God's glory into the life of someone else today. Is there a friend that needs to know you are present and available for them? Is there a need that you can help to meet in someone's life today? Don't get hung up on only what you perceive as "big stuff." God is present in all our "little everyday stuff" as well, and it's through that stuff that He proves His faithfulness over and over. When you reflect the Glory of God upon your life to the life of someone else, it brings blessings all around. God will be glorified by your faithfulness, the other person will be blessed by God's glory reflected through you, and you will feel a renewed closeness to the Father as you see Him working in and through your life.

5. Pray to God and ask Him to give you the opportunity to point someone to Him today.

Few things will draw our hearts closer to God than pointing other people towards Him and His love for them. No matter where you are in your relationship with the Father, helping others to see and know Him is one of the best ways to increase your desire for Him in your own life.

For many of us, sharing about our personal faith in His son, Jesus, can fill us with anxiety — but there is no better way to point someone to the Father than pointing them to the Son. One of the best ways to begin a conversation about Jesus is to share what He has done for you in your own life. Talk about how God, through His Son, has worked in and through your own life story, weaving your life into His greater story in the process. Telling others our story is personal, and it is something they can listen to and accept without judgment. It's a short step to move from sharing what Jesus has done in your own life to suggesting what Jesus might do in someone else's life. Sharing Scriptures that are meaningful to you, or that have helped you navigate key moments of your life, is another great way to help someone else experience Him. And while it may make you nervous to open up to someone else about your faith and to ask them about their own, it also requires such a dependence on God and His Holy Spirit that it will unfailingly increase your own personal desire for Him.

6. If God feels very distant from you, pray something similar to this multiple times each day: "Even though I don't feel You right now, I believe You are near. Fill me with Your presence. Help me to see You at work in my life."

Sometimes we don't feel God as closely as we would like. During those seasons of life, it is important to remember that our perceptions and God's reality are not always the same. To get your perceptions back on track, commit to affirming the presence of God in your life even when you aren't feeling it. By repeating this prayer throughout your day, you are affirming to yourself God is bigger than you and your own personal feelings. You are recognizing He is bigger than your ability to perceive Him. You are affirming He is always faithful to you. You are remembering He will not leave or abandon you, no matter what. The more you ask God to "show up" and be seen in your life, the more likely you will recognize it when He does.

7. For one day, abstain from all social media platforms.

Take a day to abstain from all social media platforms you routinely use. When you feel the urge to check in on others or share your thoughts, stop yourself and instead take a moment to pray and thank God for the life He has given you. If you struggle to think of things to be thankful for in your life, start with the most basic: the air you breathe, the last meal you ate, one person who you know cares about you. From there, thank Him for the needs in your life He has met — even the ones you are not aware of. Put Him, and time spent with Him, above the time you spend on social media for that day. Social media is great for reestablishing

contact and keeping in touch with friends and loved ones in our life. But like any good thing, overuse carries the risk of elevating it too high on our priority list. When the pulls of social media become strong, it can consume our time and attention, distort our view of what is normal and acceptable, and negatively impact our emotional and mental well-being.

8. Spend time praying in a posture that reflects God's authority in your life.

It is easy for important things to become commonplace and rote when we do them over and over. Prayer is a great example of this, and we can often be guilty of falling into a routine way of prayer that decreases its importance to us. One way you can fight to keep prayer significant and meaningful is to spend time praying in different postures that reflect God's authority in your life. Instead of praying while sitting in a chair or while lying in bed before going to sleep, get down on your knees. Lie down on the floor, face down, in submission and humility before God. Lay flat on your back, opening your arms with palms facing up towards Him. Whatever position you assume, be mindful of the greatness of God and let your posture reflect your dependence on and appreciation for Him.

9. Recite the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) out loud each morning when you wake and each evening before going to sleep.

The Lord's Prayer that Jesus prayed with His disciples is not magical, but it is powerful — it is the model for prayer Jesus himself encouraged. By reciting this prayer at the beginning and ending of your days, you will be imitating the person who had the closest prayer connection with the Father. As you read Jesus' words, try reading them out loud as well as silently to yourself. Try changing the emphasis in each section of the prayer to focus on different words with each reading. Visualize God's name being praised, God's kingdom coming to fruition, and God's will being done on the Earth. Name the daily bread that you need in your life today. Ask for His forgiveness for the trespasses you have committed against Him and against your fellow men and women. Call out the specific temptations you want the Father to help you avoid. With each word you utter, feel the power of Jesus' words flow from Him, through you, and out towards God's creation.

FOUR

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH READING

Reading is important to the spiritual development of all Christians. Nothing else can compare to the value of reading the Bible, but reading other Christian works (like the book you're reading now!) also helps to stretch and grow our faith. If reading has not been a priority or an interest for you, then start slow. Don't be discouraged if you're not a fast reader — that is not important. When it comes to reading God's word, or reading what others write about God's word, it is far more beneficial to read slowly and understand what you are reading. Let it soak into your mind and your heart. Let it marinate for a while as you think about what you read and consider what it means to you.

10. Read the Bible

Nothing will make you thirst for God more than drinking straight from His fountain! The more you read His word, the more you will want to know Him. Many different Bible reading plans can be found on the internet, and you can find links to a few of them in chapter 10, Resources, and in the Resources section of our website. Whether you choose to follow a daily reading plan or just decide to pick a book of the Bible and start reading it at your own pace, the goal is to read consistently. The more we read God's Word, the more we learn about God's Son, Jesus. The more we learn about Jesus, the more we learn about God Himself. The more we learn about God, the more we will want to know about Him.

11. Read a different Bible translation.

Most Christians have a Bible translation they prefer, and that's a good thing. But if you're feeling distant from God, reading a different translation can really help to experience His word — and ultimately God himself — in a fresh way. Not all translations are created equally, but when our goal is to increase our appetite for God, different translations will help us to know Him more fully. If you find yourself struggling with comprehension as you read, you might want to look at modern English paraphrase texts like *The Living Bible* or *The Message*.

These are great resources for getting into the habit of reading the Bible.

12. Set a specific time to do your Bible reading.

If you're struggling with your desire for God, reading the Bible will help to know Him better. Setting a specific time to read His word can help to make it a consistent habit. As your Bible reading becomes more consistent, you will likely find your desire to read it will increase as well. Don't set huge goals that are difficult or unattainable. If you are not in the habit of daily Bible reading, start small. Taking five minutes every day to read a verse or two, or a short passage, is a great place to start. As you develop the habit of Bible reading, you'll probably find you want to read more than just five minutes each day, and you can increase that time as your schedule and daily circumstances allow.

13. Set a specific place to do your Bible reading.

Just like having a consistent time to read the Bible, having a specific place will help in developing this spiritual habit. Whether it's a comfy chair, the kitchen table, or a quiet shaded area outside, make a point of establishing a consistent reading place. Some people find it helpful to incorporate some sort of routine for settling into their reading spot. This might include preparing a specific beverage to enjoy, lighting a candle, playing some

background music, or some other way to tell your mind and your heart you are entering into a sacred space for a sacred purpose. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but if you make it consistent then your body, mind, and spirit will begin to respond. Regular routines can often lead to a positive sense of anticipation — perhaps you have experienced this with brewing your morning coffee or tea.

14. Get a Bible reading partner.

Being consistent can sometimes be difficult. Life is demanding for everyone, and we all have competing interests that pull us away from even our most firm resolve. Having a reading partner is a great way to build in some accountability and encouragement for your Bible reading. Agree on a reading plan and get together on a regular basis to check in with each other. Give each other permission to ask if you have been faithful in your reading and give each other grace when the commitment is not met. The purpose shouldn't be to "crack the whip" or to induce guilt, but to inspire each other to stay on course to achieve your goal. The added benefit of having someone else to share and discuss the most recent passage is a plus, and it will help you both to "spur one another on" in your reading endeavors.

15. Read a book that will help develop a deeper desire for God.

It is easy to forget that many other people, both now and throughout history, struggle with the same issues and challenges we ourselves face. When you are feeling distant from God the undisputable best thing to do is to read His word. But another very good thing to do is to read what others say about God and about knowing and desiring Him. Fortunately for us, there are a multitude of wonderful books that have been written specifically to help cultivate our desire for God. In Chapter ten you will find several great books I highly recommend. You'll also find the link to our website, which contains an even larger list that is updated regularly. Get a copy of one of these excellent books, take your time, read slowly, and allow the wisdom of other Christians to speak to your soul through the written word. If you know you're not a big reader, then try listening to a few audiobooks as an alternative. Many of them are well done, and they are perfect for long commutes, car rides, or listening while doing household chores and other tasks. Many public libraries now offer a good selection of digital media, so be sure to check there for free access to both audiobooks and eBooks.

16. Read a book about a characteristic of God (His grace, His mercy, His love, His compassion, His faithfulness, etc.).

There are a multitude of books that explore the many characteristics of God. Pick a trait that interests you, then look for a book that investigates that topic (again, check Chapter ten for some great suggestions). A couple of my favorite authors are Craig Groeschel and Francis Chan. Regardless of your preferred style, you will find so many books to choose from that you will wish you had more time to read them all.

17. Pick a person from the Bible who went through a time when God seemed distant to them and read their story. Consider reading a book about them as well.

When we are working through challenges and issues in our life, it is common to feel as if we are the only people to have ever dealt with what we are experiencing. Our head may know this cannot be true, but our heart may be slower to believe, leaving us wallowing in isolation and despondency. A way to proactively push against this feeling is to read and explore the stories of those real people in the Bible who also experienced a time when God felt distant. As we come to know more about their stories, we can better understand our own stories — and often we can see their hope is in fact our hope as well. As you look for people to

read about, you might consider some of the following: Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, David, Ruth, Job, Moses, Peter, Mary Magdalene, or Paul. Pick one of these individuals and take time to read through their particular story in Scripture. See how God worked in their life, even when they were not aware of or felt very distant from Him. Be encouraged that, just as He did for each one of these heroes of the faith, God can and will work in your life as well.

FIVE

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH WRITING

If reading the title of this chapter makes you nervous, please don't worry. Most of the ideas in this chapter involve creating some sort of list, while a few others involve writing letters or journaling. The true goal is to get things out of your head and onto the page (or onto digital ink in your phone, tablet, or computer), so you can turn abstract ideas into something more concrete. The real advantage of writing out these lists and other ideas is to be able to look at them repeatedly throughout your day or week, and to be able to come back to them again at some point further down the road.

18. Make a list of things you need to confess to God.

Often, the reason we struggle with a desire to know God more fully is because we have sin in our lives that is acting as a wedge between us and God. Take an honest look at your heart, your thoughts, your attitudes, your motivations, your words, and your actions. Do you see any areas where God is not the ruler? Do you recognize patterns of giving in to temptations that are a hindrance to your spiritual walk? Take time to confess these things, one by one, to Him in prayer. It is amazing how much more we long for God's presence in our lives when we are not trying to hide things from Him.

19. Make a list of things you are thankful to God for providing/giving you.

Being thankful is essential to our longing for God. When we recognize and remember what He has done for us in the past, it is easier to see Him at work in the now and to have hope for what He might do in the future. Keep this running list somewhere you can easily access so you can look it over regularly and add to it when you think of something new. You might want to purchase a spiral notebook, a composition book, or a journal for this and any other things you would like to record about your spiritual life and growth. You might prefer a digital option, like a note-taking app on a phone or tablet. These options make

searching later much easier, and most of us carry our phone with us all the time.

20. Make a list of things that distract you from a deeper desire for God.

We all have things in our lives that compete for our attention, our time, our money, our energy, and our focus. Our relationship with God should be at the very top of our list. But if we are honest, we often allow other things to become a higher priority. By creating a list of things that distract you from a deeper desire for God, you can begin the work of reprioritizing them in a healthy way. Sit down with pencil and paper, or your notebook, or your notes app, and think about your typical day. What things demand your attention? Do these things drown everything else out, even when they are not an urgent or immediate task at hand? If so, put them on the list. It might be helpful to walk through your past week, day by day, and think about all the people, places, activities, and thoughts you can remember. This is definitely one of those lists you should put down for a bit when you can't think of anything else. Pick it back up again the next day or next week to revisit and see what else you might have remembered.

21. Make a list of the aspects of God that amaze you.

Lists are a helpful way for many of us to take stock of things. Making a list of the aspects of God you find amazing will force you to take stock of Him as well. This should be — like most good lists — one you hang on to, revisit, and add to over time. Some aspects or characteristics you might consider include (but certainly are not limited to!): His unconditional love for you despite anything you may have done in your past that you feel disappoints Him; His unfathomable forgiveness that goes far beyond your own ability to forgive others; His faithfulness that always delivers His promises, even if it is usually in ways we have not expected or anticipated; His creativity that is spectacularly displayed throughout all of His amazing creation; His peace that transcends the chaos of our schedules, stress, and circumstances. The list could be endless because God is infinite!

22. Make a list of ways you see God at work around you.

As we go through our days, it is often quite apparent God is at work in and through the people and circumstances of our lives. A wonderful way to increase your desire for Him is to recognize and keep track (another list!) of such instances when you notice them. It might be a friend who shares an incredible “coincidence” making a positive difference in her life. Perhaps it’s a coworker who prayed

for healing for a relative who then did in fact recover. Or perhaps you had your own financial need that was unexpectedly met. Once you begin to look for God at work around you, you will be amazed at just how active and involved in the day-to-day stuff of life He truly is. Writing these down will provide you with a comfort and assurance that God is not some distant, uninvolved architect of the universe who eons ago wound it all up and now sits back and disinterestedly watches it all play out. You'll see His love and concern for His creation acted out over and over, which will help significantly when you are going through a challenging situation where it is difficult to see Him at work. It's in those moments you can pull out this list and remember how present and involved He really is.

23. Every evening, write down 3 things from your day you are grateful to God for.

Keeping some sort of "gratitude journal" is a wonderful way to bring your day back around to God and His provisions. Whether you choose to use a paper notebook or a digital journal, take just a couple of minutes each evening and jot down three things from your day you are grateful to God for. If you already keep a journal, just add this as another entry each day. By keeping this log, you will, over time, develop an expectation for seeing God at work

around you throughout the day. This will cultivate a deeper desire to appreciate and know Him in your life.

24. Make a list of ways you can celebrate God's goodness and glory in appropriate ways at your place of employment or in your business.

Most places of employment have rules — either spelled out explicitly or unwritten but understood — about how employees may express their faith in the workplace. The key to being a good witness while also respecting your employer's policies is to keep in mind you are not looking for ways to explicitly express your faith to others (although that may still happen indirectly). Instead, focus on how you might encourage and build up your own feelings of gratitude and appreciation for God and His work in and around you. Some suggestions — which might be more helpful in some work environments and less so in others — include:

- Listen to music that praises God and moves your mind to Him and His Kingdom (ear buds or headphones are great for office/work environments where speakers would be inappropriate).
- Pray silently for coworkers and/or customers whom you interact with throughout your day.

- Commit to acting with integrity in all situations, asking God for strength in circumstances where doing so will run against the norm of expectations in your work culture.
- Be honest in all circumstances, even when doing so does not benefit you (or might even work to your disadvantage). God is much more interested in the means than He is in the ends, so honor Him by putting honesty ahead of personal gain.
- Be a calming presence. Don't allow yourself to be dramatically emotional about everything that happens on the job. Not overreacting will honor God because it is a statement of your trust that He is in control of all things, even when it appears things are out of control.
- Seek out ways to be a blessing to others, rather than a burden to them. Every single person you work with and for is also a unique individual whose life is filled with stresses and problems. Honor God by being someone who encourages and lifts up others, even when you might feel they "don't deserve it."

25. Compile an "A-to-Z" list of attributes of God by writing down words that describe Him and begin with each letter of the alphabet (i.e. Available, Benevolent, Caring...)

This is a great exercise to remind ourselves why God is worthy of our devotion and why we should be pursuing a close relationship with Him. You can make your list using the first words that come to mind for each letter, or you can challenge yourself by using a dictionary and a thesaurus to find more creative descriptions. This would be an excellent list to keep someplace where you will see it on a regular basis. If you're artistic, you might consider writing it out in a creatively expressive way with fun doodles or quick little drawings for each letter of the list).

26. Write a letter to God. Tell Him how much you long for His presence and to know Him more.

The benefits of writing down our thoughts are well documented. Being able to get them out of the murky thoughts of the mind and down into concrete words on paper (or digital ink) is a huge step to putting our thoughts into action in our lives. Set aside some time to write out a letter to God. In your letter, tell your Heavenly Father how much you long for His presence. If He has felt distant or absent, share that. If you feel like you have allowed your own personal circumstances, actions, or sins

to drive a wedge between you and Him, share that. Express your heart and tell God exactly how you feel right now. Let Him know you long for His presence. Let Him know you desire to know Him more deeply. Ask Him to show you the next step you need to take to move back towards Him. Plead with Him to help you discern your priorities and to get them in the correct order according to His perfect will. Don't hold back. God is big enough to handle whatever you want to say to Him. When you are finished, you have a few options as to what to do with the letter you have written. You can simply destroy it or toss it in the trash. Just writing out your thoughts is the point of this exercise, and that is enough. If you want to take it a step further, you might consider putting the letter in an envelope and writing "To God" along with the date on it. File or tuck it away somewhere, and at some point in the future you may want to come back and revisit what you've said to Him on this day, perhaps to see and acknowledge how He has responded to your words. One more option — which you should only choose after careful consideration — would be to give the letter to a close Christian friend, or mentor, or your pastor, to let someone else know just how you are feeling towards God at this moment. If you do pursue this option, be sure to let them know you are not looking for a response from them, other than the understanding that you are

communicating with God and the affirmation that this is a good thing.

27. Think about someone you know who appears to have a close relationship with God. List all the characteristics you see in them that cause you to feel that way. Consider writing a brief note to them to let them know how you see God reflected in their life and in their walk.

Sometimes we see others who seem to have a close relationship with God — they talk about what He is doing in their life, they have a strong prayer life, they express a desire to walk in His path. Think about someone you know who seems to reflect a God-centered life. Make a list of all the characteristics and qualities they display which make you feel they must have a connection with God. Look over the list and think about what characteristics you might try to reflect in your life as well. As an extra challenge, consider writing a note or sending a card to them and telling them some of the ways you see God reflected in their life. By encouraging them, you will be reflecting God's spirit as an encourager yourself!

28. Make a list of people who have been influential to your spiritual growth, taking time to pray for each one of them as you add them to your list.

Almost everyone who grows in the faith does so with the help of someone else (or, most likely, many others). Reflect on the individuals and groups who have had an influence on your own spiritual development. As the names and faces come to mind, write them down in a list. Take time to pray for that person, thanking God for the impact they have had upon your life and your growth. Thank God for using them and for working through them for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom. As you pray, ask God to pour out His blessing upon them and their life and their ministry. Ask Him to show you specific things to pray for. Ask Him to be very real and present in their life today. As your list grows, return to these names from time to time and continue to pray for them. You might consider writing an encouraging note to specifically thank them for the role they have had in your spiritual development. By acknowledging their contribution, you are acknowledging the importance of the Body of Christ in the lives of all believers.


29. Keep a journal of times in your life when you couldn't see God at work in the moment, but then it became clear afterwards God was present and involved.

As we go through our daily life, we are often oblivious to how God is at work in the people and circumstances we interact with. It is often well afterwards before we begin to

see how our heavenly Father has been at work in and through those seemingly mundane moments. One key to discerning God at work in the moment is to remember those times that we have not recognized His hand at work in the moment but have seen it when looking back. To help with this process, consider keeping a journal (or adding to your current journal) of times in your life when you couldn't see God at work in the moment, but then it became clear afterwards how God was actually present and involved in the situation. By recording these moments — and going back through them from time to time — you will become more mindful of the fact that God is invested and does play a role in your daily life. As this awareness increases, you will begin to see the subtle ways He touches nearly every moment and step of your life. This awareness will help to foster your growth and dependence upon Him, even when you are not sure how He is interacting with your life. As you grow and mature in your faith, you will find yourself wondering less whether God is doing anything at all and becoming more expectant to see how He is at work each and every day.

SIX

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH SHARING YOUR FAITH

ur journey to intimacy with God is not meant to be a solitary one. The very nature of the Trinity — God as Father, Son, and Spirit — displays a communal God who desires community from His people. The sharing of our faith is a valuable part of our spiritual growth. The term “sharing your faith” might sound intimidating to you, especially if you only understand that to mean telling other people about how they can know God through following Jesus. Sharing Jesus is certainly a big part of sharing your faith with others, but it is not the only part. Sharing your faith also means to invite — and allow — others into the experiencing of your faith. This is done whenever you include them in your own spiritual journey, however that may take place.

In the following set of ideas, consider the common theme of including others in your own spiritual journey. As you create opportunities for them to see your own experience, you will find yourself depending more and more upon God's presence and guidance. And who knows, those you share your experience with may even become interested in embarking on their own journey of faith.

30. Send a note, a text message, an email, or a letter to someone and tell them how you see God reflected in their life.

Most of us don't do nearly enough encouraging of other people, and this is a win/win idea that will bless someone else as well as yourself. Maybe you've seen their generous life and it reminds you of how generous God is to us all. Perhaps you saw the way they helped someone else out without making a big fuss or drawing undue attention to their efforts, and you can share how that reminded you of the humility of Jesus who spent His life serving others. By taking the short time to acknowledge and encourage them you are making an investment in their life. At the same time, you're increasing your awareness of God at work in the lives of others and in your own life. Don't be at all surprised if this practice of looking for God's reflection in others becomes something you find yourself doing more and more regularly.

31. Send a note to someone and ask them to pray specifically for your desire to know and seek God more.

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel may have declared, “I am a rock. I am an island,” but that is not how God created us to live our lives. He knows we need encouragement and prayer ourselves, just as we should encourage and pray for others. Don’t get turned off to this idea because you don’t want to be one of “those” people who seem to always be competing for the “oh woe is me” award. The idea here is that others often don’t pray for us because they have no idea of the specific things in our lives we might need prayers for. So put away your pride and pick up your pen (or keyboard if you’d prefer to send an email or text message), then let someone know your prayer needs. Be brief, to the point, and don’t add unnecessary details that might serve as a distraction. Also be careful not to reveal anything personal about someone else — this is a prayer request, not a gossip column! You don’t need to follow up with additional details later, or even ask if they received your request (if they don’t offer that up themselves). But you might consider following up when the prayers are answered or are no longer necessary, thanking them for their friendship and faithfulness in prayer.

32. Call someone you know and tell them about how God is working in your life today.

Sometimes we just need to speak what's on our heart and hear another voice respond. Calling a friend or an acquaintance to share with them what God is doing in your life is great for you because it forces you to acknowledge and articulate how you see God at work. It's also great for the other person because it challenges them to also see how God is at work, and it might encourage them to look for how He is active in their own life as well. Be on guard against gossip, and don't overshare. Be brief and to the point, give God the glory, and tell them you just had to let someone know.

33. Write a social media post giving God the glory for something that is going on in your life.

Social media gets blamed for many things in our culture, but ultimately it is simply a mirror for society at large — and for us as individuals. What we see in that mirror is just a reflection of what is in our own hearts, minds, and mouths. A wonderful way to increase your desire for God is to use social media to give Him the glory for the things that are happening in your life. By pulling the focus away from you and placing it on Him, you will be helping to make the platform (at least your small part of it!) a more blessed

space. You might want to consider starting your post with one of the following prompts:

- *Today, I saw God at work in my life when...*
- *One way I have seen God at work lately is...*
- *I want to start this morning by sharing how good God has been to me...*

34. Share a negative event in your life that God used for His Glory.

Sharing how God is working in your life can be impactful for both you and others. Sharing how God has worked in you through a negative experience can be even more powerful. Everyone goes through difficult times. Everyone knows what it's like to have challenging seasons. By sharing how God has worked through a hard time in your life, you are offering hope to those who might themselves be experiencing such a time right now. Helping them to see how, in hindsight, God was still present and at work in your struggles shines a bright light onto their struggles as well. Pointing to His promise to be faithful to us and to never leave us — in the context of a struggle you have walked through personally — can help build the faith and increase the perseverance of someone else who is walking through a dark time. The added bonus in doing this for

others is that by sharing we remind ourselves of His faithfulness to us, which in turn draws us closer to Him.

35. Think about someone you know who seems spiritually disinterested and far from God. Spend time praying for them, that God would make His love and grace known to them in a very real and tangible way. Pray God would give you an opportunity to play a role in that revelation.

Most of us know someone, or more likely several people, who seem to be uninterested in knowing or learning about God. They may be otherwise good people who simply do not have a desire for God in their life. One effective way you can make an impact on their life is to spend time praying for them. Be as specific as possible in your prayers, asking God to make His love and grace known to them in a very real and tangible way. Pray they would see God's love in Jesus and that their heart would be open to their need for a savior. Ask that God use the people and circumstances of their life to draw them to Him. Ask God to let *you* play a role in them knowing more about Him, whatever that might look like. When you genuinely long for people who are far from God to grow closer to Him, it is a clear indication that your own walk with the Father is growing deeper. Rely on Him to give you the words for your prayers, and perhaps

even the words for your friend to hear, that they might understand, believe, and accept for themselves the beautiful news of Jesus.

SEVEN

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH HELPING OTHERS

Jesus admonished His followers to love others. The authors of the New Testament helped to flesh out this command by encouraging us to show our love for other people by doing good to and for them. It is not enough to simply declare our love for others and then turn a blind eye to their needs and struggles. Love is born out through our actions!

As you seek to grow closer to God, consider how you might do so through helping others. This certainly includes the sharing of your faith and the sharing of the Gospel message, but it includes being proactive to meet their needs as well. When we do so, we become the proverbial hands and feet of Jesus. We reflect Him to those we are helping, and we grow closer to Him in the process. Here are

some ideas for you to consider working into your life as you look to help others.

36. Drive through your community looking for people and things to praise God for.

This is a wonderful way to get your focus once again off yourself and back onto God and what He is up to in the world. It can be so easy to “navel-gaze” (the tendency to look exclusively at ourselves and ignore everything else) and only focus on what God is doing — or isn’t doing — in our life. By going out and intentionally looking for God’s work in your community, you will be forced to turn your attention away from yourself and towards Him. As you see areas that demand God’s praise, you will also see areas that are in desperate need of Him and His love. If this drives you to become more involved in your community in order to make Him more known, you may be prodded into a position of greater dependence upon your Heavenly Father.

37. Meet a basic need someone else has without expecting or asking for anything in return.

There are needs all around us, every day, if we will just open our eyes and look around. No one can meet every need, fix every problem, or solve every bad situation. But anyone can help meet one single need. The key —

whatever you choose to do — is to not make it about yourself and your actions. Be discreet. Act anonymously when possible. Spend time quietly listening to how it makes you feel and how it changes your relationship with the other person/people you are helping. Jesus calls us to treat others the way we would want to be treated. Here are some suggestions to get you started as you look for needs around you:

- For one week, give to every person who asks you for money. It doesn't have to be much — just a couple of dollars can make all the difference in the world to someone. Be prepared with some bills set aside, and if/when you are asked don't hesitate to give what you can. You can offer to pray for the person you're helping or engage them in conversation to learn a little more about them and their situation if possible.
- Get some fast-food gift cards and carry them with you. When you see someone in need or asking for assistance, give them a gift card so they can have a warm meal.
- Go grocery shopping for a local food bank or shelter. You might check with them in advance to see what needs they have, or just pick up a few

staple items that have a good shelf life. Drop them off and see if there are other items they might need that you could pick up from time-to-time. Remember, you don't need to fully stock their shelves to help them out — even just a few items will make a difference.

- Gather up some gently used clothes from your closet and take them to a local shelter to drop off. Feel free to ask friends if they have anything they'd like to donate as well and offer to pick the items up and deliver them yourself.
- Pick a street, park, or other area in your community and spend 20 minutes picking up trash.

38. Read through the local newspaper's obituary section and ask for God to provide His grace, peace, and love upon each family represented there.

The world around us is filled with grieving people. Every week, local newspapers and funeral home websites are filled with obituaries of those who have recently passed away. While you likely don't know most of those individuals personally, their obituaries are your connection to the families left behind. Take some time to be intentional in your prayers for those who have lost a loved one or a

dear friend. Open up the obituary section of your local paper — or search online for the local funeral home and browse to their obituary page — then read through each of the listings. In your journal or notes app, make notes of each person who has passed recently, adding the names of any survivors who are listed. As you write these names down, pray for God’s peace and presence in their life during this traumatic time. Ask for God to make the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit available to them. Ask that God will provide opportunities for them to know the hope of His son, Jesus Christ, in the midst of their grief. As you pray for God to be very real and known to each of them, He will be more real and known to you as well.

39. Walk the sidewalk / parking lot / grounds of your local schools and pray for God's love to be made known to every single student, teacher, and staff member there at that school.

This is a powerful way to impact and influence the young minds and hearts of your community. Because of the (understandable) aversion to strangers on the campus, be sure to get permission to come onto the property if you are going to go during actual school hours. A better approach might be to wait until after school hours or on a weekend to stop by — you don’t need to go inside the building for

this to be effective. If you don't feel comfortable getting out of your vehicle, you can even just sit in the parking lot and pray over the facility, lifting up the students that attend, the teachers who instruct, and the staff who lead and serve. If you can get out and walk around, consider walking the perimeter of the building, praying for the specific classrooms on the other side of the windows and walls. Pray for the cooks and servers in the cafeteria. Lift up the custodians and maintenance staff who keep the grounds, classrooms, and bathrooms clean and in good repair. Pray over the playgrounds and sports fields for the safety and enjoyment of all who participate. Pray around the buses for all the drivers who transport kids back and forth. You might even consider organizing a group to do this together before the school year starts — prayer walking around each of the schools in your community. Asking God for His presence and blessings on others will help increase your own heart's desire for that in your life.

40. While grocery shopping, as you walk the aisles pray that those shopping there for their physical hunger will experience God filling their spiritual hunger.

Walking through the grocery store on autopilot is something that countless people do every day. Make your time in the grocery more intentional by praying for those you see and pass as they do their weekly shopping. Pray

God would give them an opportunity to know His love for them. Ask for the very real presence of the Holy Spirit to be felt in their lives. Plead to God that each one of them might know the hope and the joy of the gospel of Jesus. Pray, as Jesus shared with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), that though they would be temporarily filled by the food they are purchasing today, that they would be eternally filled by God through His son Jesus Christ.

41. Call, text, email, or write someone you know and ask them how you might specifically pray for them this week. Be sure to carry through with lifting them up in prayer.

Praying for others is a simple and powerfully effective way to feel God more strongly in our own life. The more we pray for others, the more we are acknowledging God is in control and able to provide for the needs of those who call upon His name. Put this into practice this week by reaching out to someone you know with a phone call, text message, email, or note and asking them how you can pray specifically for them at this time. You don't need to be heavy handed or overly spiritual, just let them know you are praying for them and would like to know if there is anything in particular they would like for you to lift up to God on their behalf. If they respond back, simply thank them and let them know you will be praying for them.

Then be sure to spend time praying for those things they shared with you. You don't need every detail to lift up prayer requests. God is well aware of their needs even if they don't share details. Your job is to be faithful to pray, and in doing so you will be increasing your own faith in God and His ability to provide.

EIGHT

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH REFLECTION

Reflecting upon God, His character, His commands, and His love is a natural response to growing closer to Him. The more we know Him, the more we want to know of Him. The following set of ideas will give you some very specific ways to reflect on God. Be mindful and aware of your thoughts as you attempt these exercises. As busy and chaotic as our lives often are, it's easy to “veg out” when we take time to think and reflect. Don't allow your mind to drift aimlessly – or to sleep! Keep reengaging with the prompts of the exercise, reflecting on the question and goals, and pushing forward toward clarity of thought and feeling. As you do, you will be rewarded with the presence of God's Spirit in your mind and in your heart.

42. Set a Reminder that prompts you 3 times each day to stop for a moment and meditate on God's Glory.

Life is busy and we all need a reminder from time to time. Leverage your technology to help you in your Christian walk and growth! Setting a reminder on your phone, watch, tablet, or computer is a pretty easy thing to do, but it can have such a huge impact. Different apps will handle this in their own ways, but a simple solution is to create three separate reminders: one for 8am, one for 2pm, and one for 7pm (or whatever times work best for you). Then set each of those three reminders to repeat daily with no end date. Now you'll get reminded three times every day to take just a moment to think about God, about His love for you, and about His glory.

43. Periodically throughout your day focus on your breathing by inhaling while making the sound "Yah" and exhaling the sound "Weh"... The name of God: "Yahweh."

This is another great way to pause a few times each day to focus on God — and if it helps, just set up reminders in your phone or other device to prod you until it becomes a habit. As you breathe in and out you will be focusing on the One who gives you that very breath.

44. For one day, write a single word every hour that describes God for you in that moment.

This can be a very revealing exercise if you're committed to sticking with it throughout the entire day. Start by setting a reminder or alarm that will alert you every hour (phones and watches are great for this). When your alarm notifies you, take a moment and write down a single-word description of God. Don't try to filter your word or make it pretty — be honest and spontaneous. It doesn't matter if you go the more traditional route of pen and paper, jotting down your words in a notebook, journal, or composition book, or if you take advantage of newer mediums and keep your list on your phone, tablet, or laptop. The important thing is getting the words down quickly and without taking time to “dress them up.” At the end of your day, take time to go back and read through the list you have made. What words stand out to you? Are there any that cause you to pause? Is it obvious your situation in the moment dictated your choice of words, or do they seem to transcend the specifics of your location and circumstances? After finishing, take your list (print it out if you need to) and place it where you'll see it frequently over the next week. Feel free to add more words to the list as they come to you, or to continue with the reminders and diligently record them throughout the week. By reflecting on the words that

bubble out of you, you will get a better understanding of what God means to you in this specific season of life.

45. When you next go to worship at your church, take time during the service to thank God for each individual element of the worship experience.

We often approach worship with a “what’s in it for me” attitude. We want the environment to please us, we want the music to be our preferred style, and we want the message to stimulate and challenge us. Unfortunately, when we approach worship in this way, we often get far less out of it than we should. Either the presentation of worship doesn’t meet the standards and expectations that we have set in advance, or we are so comfortable with all the elements that we don’t notice God challenging our heart, mind, and soul. A great way to push back against your own desire for personal comfort and preference is to begin intentionally noting every individual element of the worship service, and then giving God your praise and thankfulness for those elements. When you are busy thanking God for music that praises Him, it is harder to dismiss that music when it doesn’t meet your individual tastes. If you are thanking God for the individual who is leading corporate prayer, then you are much less likely to respond to the person’s prayer in a judgmental or condescending manner when they use a different

vernacular than you. Simply acknowledging God for providing the chair you're sitting in or the room you're meeting in will help you focus on Him rather than on yourself. Praising God for the individual elements of worship will help you experience Him more intimately as you worship Him yourself.

46. Take time to watch a sunrise or sunset all the way through, meditating on the glory of God that He created something so beautiful for us to enjoy.

Life moves so fast. Our schedules can get so full. Sometimes days and weeks can fly by without us even realizing they are gone. As time flies by, so do our opportunities to see God's greatness and creativity reflected in His creation of our world. Push back against the hurry and busyness by choosing to stop and watch a sunrise or a sunset all the way through. Find a comfortable spot to sit — on a porch or deck, in your car in a parking lot, at the beach, by a pond, or at a park. Bring your favorite beverage to sip on. Put your phone down (or turn it off) and relax. As the sun begins to come up or go down, be aware of the changes in the sky around you. Look east and west. Watch for reflections on water or glass or metal. Appreciate the way the clouds reflect the light. Smile. Thank God for creating this amazing moment of dazzling creativity and thank Him for allowing you to slow down enough to enjoy it.

NINE

GROWING CLOSER TO GOD THROUGH OTHER MEANS

This final set of ideas are “everything else.” These are the ones that don’t fit neatly into the previous categories, but each of them is a powerful opportunity to grow further in your relationship with God. If you feel that some of these ideas are a bit too “creative” for you, that’s okay. These experiences are for you to draw closer to your Heavenly Father, not for you to display for everyone else to see. Be bold, stretch yourself, and give them a try. Maybe you’ll feel a little foolish as you work on them. That’s okay, we are all foolish compared to God. Maybe you’ll feel that your talent is inadequate. That’s not a bad thing — when we feel inadequate it pushes us to rely on God and His work in us. Never forget you have been made in the image of the Almighty Creator, which means that you are a “little c” creator as well. As you explore these

more eclectic ideas, let your personal creation give glory to the Creator of all things.

47. Express your love for God by drawing or painting an image that shows His glory.

This idea might not appeal to everyone, but regardless of your artistic talent you may find yourself surprised by the uplifting power of expressing your perceptions and feelings about God's glory through a visual media. Whether you intend for others to see it or if it is for your eyes only, using art to honor and glorify Him can be a terrific spark to reignite your passion for God. Be intentional to get your "tools" out, set aside a few hours, and allow yourself to get creative and see where it leads you.

48. Create a selfie-collage of photos that reflect times you felt the presence of God in your life.

We often sense God's presence in relation to events and activities that happen in our lives, whether that be significant milestones, celebrations, difficult situations, or special encounters. Gather photographs (physical or digital) of times, places, and people in your life where you have felt the presence of God. Turn those photos into a collage you can print out, hang up, or display prominently in a place you will see every day. Your collage can be as simple as arranging the photos on a piece of cardboard or

as elaborate as your creativity and artistic abilities allow. Make it a habit to look at the collage every day, pausing for a moment to thank God for being in your life and for allowing you to experience those people, places, and events.

49. Look at works of art and take time to reflect on how God is present and reflected in some capacity in each work.

Whether you consider yourself to be artistic or not, you can still look at art and appreciate it (or not) based on how it appeals to you and moves you. Set aside some time to spend looking at works of art, whether that means going to an actual art gallery, browsing a book of artistic works, or viewing an online exhibit. As you view each work, take time to reflect on how God is present and reflected in some capacity in that particular piece. It doesn't matter if the artist intended for God to be reflected in their work or not; you have the personal freedom to discern that for yourself if you so choose. By seeing how God is made known in these works — even if that isn't the intent of the creator — we can better appreciate how He is being made known in our own life, even if we are not as personally aware of that as we might like to be.

50. Give sacrificially, asking God to bless and multiply your gift. This could be at your church, to someone you know is in need, or to a specific cause or organization you want to support.

Giving sacrificially is a wonderful way to “put our money where our faith is.” It allows us the opportunity to willingly let go of something that we typically cling to as tightly as possible. When we give sacrificially, we are acknowledging God is in control and able to meet all our needs more abundantly than we can on our own. Start by choosing where you will give your gift. Your church, or another church in your community, is a great place to start. But God is not limited in His work, and we should not be afraid to give to other non-church organizations that are doing good. Or, if you want to get more personal, consider whether there is someone you know who might be blessed by your financial gift. It doesn’t have to be a lot to make an impact on a person’s life. Five dollars for gas, ten dollars for a meal, or twenty dollars for diapers might be just the answer to someone else’s prayer. The important question is not, “How much can I afford to give?” but rather, “What would God have me do?” If giving to an individual or family directly, consider doing so anonymously — this can help you avoid unwanted praise and help them avoid a sense of indebtedness to the giver. As you give according to God’s

leading, pray He will multiply the impact and blessing of your gift far more than the amount would seem to warrant.

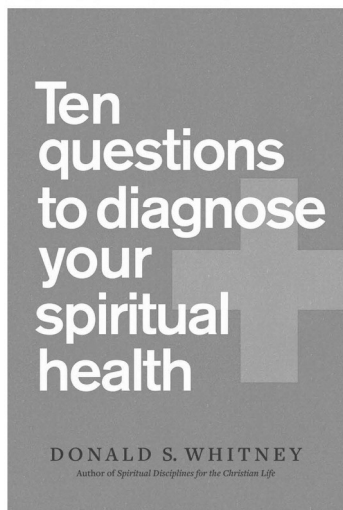
TEN OTHER RESOURCES

Listed below are several resources for you as you work on growing closer to God. In addition to the 50 ideas contained in this book, the following titles are all wonderful works that you might enjoy and benefit from.

You can also find this list of books and others — along with additional links to relevant blogs, articles, and sermons — on our website at the following page:

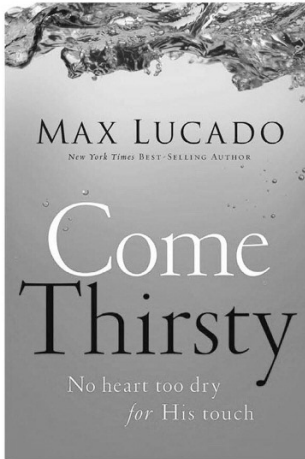
<https://heychurchmedia.com/field-guide-resources/>

Recommended Reading

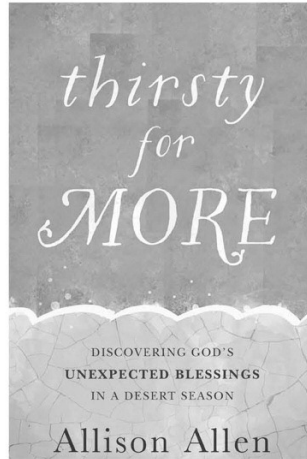


*Ten Questions to Diagnose
Your Spiritual Health*
by Donald S. Whitney

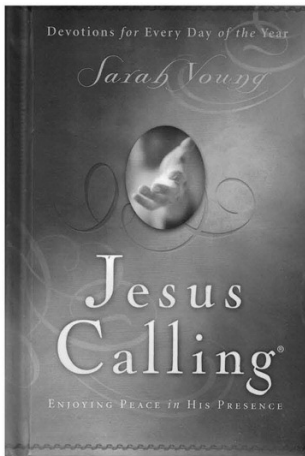
If you only get one book from this list,
this one is it!



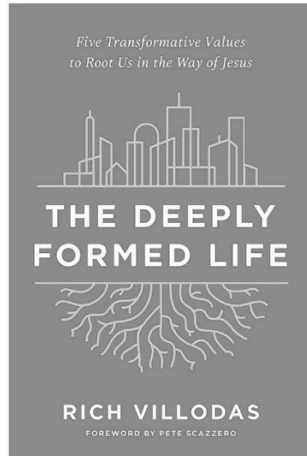
Come Thirsty
- Max Lucado



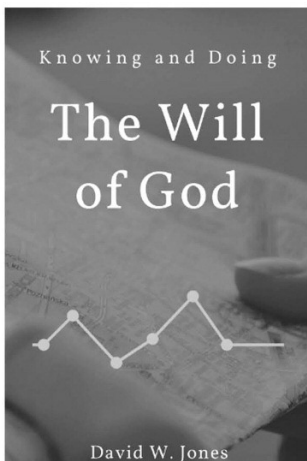
Thirsty for More
- Allison Allen



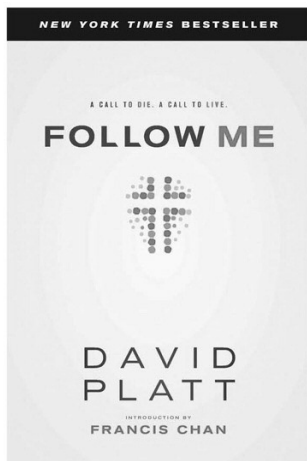
Jesus Calling
- Sarah Young



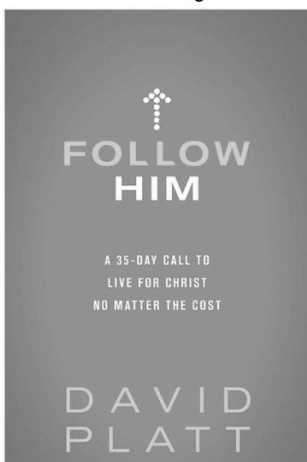
The Deeply Formed Life
- Rich Villodas



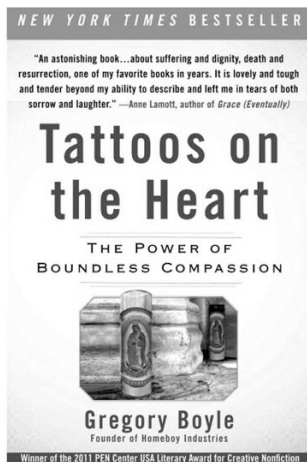
*Knowing and Doing
the Will of God*
- David W. Jones



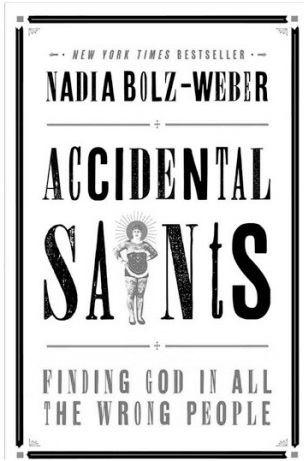
Follow Me
- David Platt



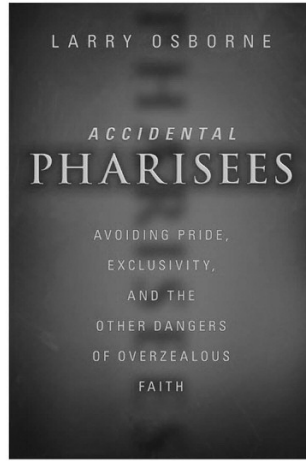
Follow Him
- David Platt



Tattoos on the Heart
- Gregory Boyle



Accidental Saints
- Nadia Bolz-Weber



Accidental Pharisees
- Larry Osborne

Be sure to check out even more helpful resources on our website at the following page:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/field-guide-resources/>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so appreciative of the people in my life who have not only been willing, but who have been eager to lend their time, skills, talents, and support to this project. Because of their help, this book is so much better than it would have been otherwise!

My thanks to Paul Ortiz for his collaboration and design skills on the cover art, and for the many read throughs and edits. I will not use the word “that” when I don’t have to. I so appreciate partnering with him at Hey Church Media, and I look forward to all of the projects ~~that~~ we have waiting in the hopper!

Thanks to Chan Rambo for encouraging me to write – and for slogging through that first rough draft (and so many others) to help turn this vision into a reality. I am looking forward to seeing her work in print one day as well! And to eating more cheesecake!

Thanks to Zach Miller for multiple revisions and edits. I remember when he first told me he was going to be an English major – little did he know that I was already

thinking of how to put that degree to my own use at some point down the road. I wish him the best as he begins med school and married life – I hope he'll have the time and energy to provide edits on future projects!

Thanks to Ross Carraway for his expertise and help with the audiobook recording, editing, and mastering. He made me sound great, and his encouragement has meant so much. The force is strong with that one!

And finally, thanks to Kim Miller for being such an incredibly supportive wife and for being my best friend. She has been “all in” from day one, and that has kept me going when I was struggling with how to move forward. Her commitment to Jesus, to me, and to our family is an encouragement to my own faith, and I am blessed beyond measure because of her. More than anyone else, this book exists because of her – mostly because she kept asking me when it would be finished! It is done. Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Charlie Miller has been a church planter, pastor, and minister for more than 25 years. He believes that following Jesus is not rocket science — but that it's not exactly easy for us, either. He lives in North Carolina with his wife, Kim. They have three children — Zach, Eli, and Joy — who help make their life a great adventure. You can contact him via email at charlie@heychurchmedia.com.

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ONE LAST THING...

Thank You For Reading My Book!

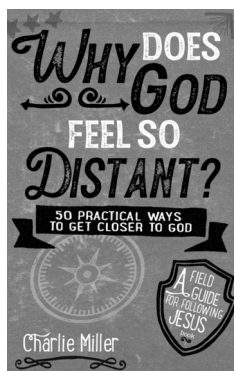


If you enjoyed this book or found it useful, I'd be very grateful if you'd post a short review on Amazon, or wherever you purchased your copy. Your support really does make a difference, and I read each review personally to make upcoming books, and future versions of this book, more helpful.

May God richly bless you and your walk with Jesus. It has been my prayer that the ideas in this series will help you in some small way. Thanks again for your support!

-Charlie Miller

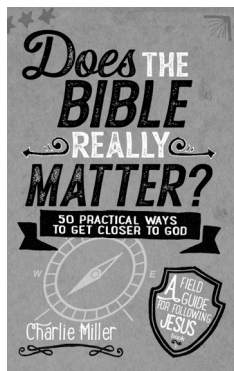
Also by Charlie Miller...



Does God feel really far away from you? Do you wonder why you can't feel His presence in your life? Are you tired of feeling like He's a million miles away?

What if there were some simple things you could do to feel closer to God? There are! This book contains 50 practical ideas - each one designed to help you get closer to God. You can start (or restart) your journey towards Him right now!

You can know God Intimately – He's waiting for you to take a step! God wants you to know, feel, and believe in His love and presence in your life each and every day - so don't put Him off any longer!



Does the Bible seem irrelevant to you? Do you struggle trying to read it and understand it? Do you wonder if it can even make a difference in your daily life?

What if there was a way to make God's Word more important to you?

There is! This book contains 50 practical ideas - each one created to help grow your love for Scripture and your appreciation for its power in your life - whether you're a first time reader or a Bible scholar!

You can connect with the Bible – God wrote it for You! God wants you to understand His Word and incorporate it in your life each and every day - so don't put Him off any longer!

Upcoming **Field Guide for Following Jesus** books

This set of 10 books will absolutely help you grow in your spiritual life and in your walk with God. Each volume gives you 50 practical ideas for growing in your faith and becoming more like Jesus. Cultivating a deep faith isn't as hard as you might think, but it doesn't just happen by

accident. All It takes is a bit of determination and a few good ideas of where to start.

Why Is Loving Others So Difficult?

50 Practical Ways to Love Others Better

Why Don't I See God Working?

50 Practical Ways to Experience God Every Day

Why Should I Care About Helping Others?

50 Practical Ways to Serve God by Serving Others

Is The Church Relevant Anymore?

50 Practical Ways to Be the Church

Do I Really Need To Work At My Faith?

50 Practical Ways to Grow Spiritually

Why Is Sin Such A Big Deal?

50 Practical Ways to Put Sin in its Place

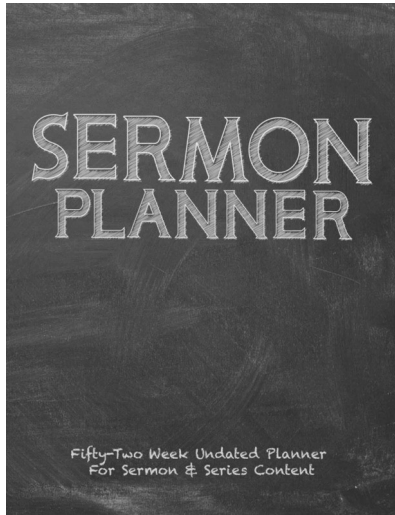
Why Should I Worry About Forgiving?

50 Practical Ways to Make Forgiveness a Priority

Does Heaven Really Make A Difference Today?

50 Practical Ways to Experience Heaven on Earth

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