



THEOLOGY IN COMMUNITY

BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

Edited by

CHRISTOPHER W. MORGAN



Contributions by Christopher W. Morgan, Nathan A. Finn, Paul R. House,
George H. Guthrie, Anthony L. Chute, Gregg R. Allison, Gregory C. Cochran,
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“As people created in the image of God and called to be like him in holiness, it is imperative for us to align how we live with what God has revealed and his purposes for us. Therefore, the gospel and the biblical witness should be the starting point for any understanding of spiritual formation. This volume does a superb job of grounding spirituality in the full range of biblical teaching. It lays an indispensable foundation.”

Clinton E. Arnold, Dean and Professor of New Testament Language and Literature, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“For some, spirituality is driven by technique; for others, it is the pursuit of direct and unmediated connection with the divine; for still others, it is a label that covers experiences of the ill-defined numinous. Indeed, today’s ‘take’ on spirituality perfectly reflects the personal autonomy found in Judges: everyone does that which is right in his or her own eyes. To think clearly about spirituality as it emerges from serious Bible study, however, is to enter a world where one really does grow in knowledge of the living God, but by the means God has ordained, by the power of the Spirit, with transformed conduct the inevitable result. Christopher Morgan and his colleagues have enriched our grasp of biblical spirituality by their biblical, theological, and historical probings.”

D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Cofounder, The Gospel Coalition

“*Spirituality* is a contemporary buzzword. Surprisingly, even some atheists speak of their spirituality. There is even a book with the title *A Little Book of Atheist Spirituality*. How important, then, is this book which presents a biblically based, theologically deep, historically informed, and practically helpful Christian examination of spirituality. A galaxy of fine scholars take the reader through the Old and New Testaments, great themes such as holiness, and the heritage of evangelical spirituality, and explore the practical implications of biblical spirituality. A rich feast!”

Graham A. Cole, Dean, Vice President of Education, and Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; author, *He Who Gives Life* and *The God Who Became Human*

“Humans are deeply spiritual beings. It’s why we seek out a greater sense of purpose and the meaning of our existence. All around us today, people are pursuing spirituality. Chris Morgan has compiled a timely and essential guidebook to true biblical spirituality that can be found only with Christ at the center. This is not an easy journey, but it is essential if we are to live a life that brings glory to God.”

Kevin Ezell, President, North American Mission Board, The Southern Baptist Convention

“There are many books on spirituality, but this one stands out because it takes in the entire range of the biblical canon. Written with scholarly depth and a practical bent, this volume is a great addition to the growing literature in the field. I highly recommend it!”

Timothy George, Founding Dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University; general editor, Reformation Commentary on Scripture

“As Francis Schaeffer taught us, the Lord’s work must be done in the Lord’s way. In every generation, therefore, we face no more urgent question than the meaning of true spirituality. The excellent team of scholars writing in *Biblical Spirituality* combines academic gifts with personal wisdom to show us, from the whole of the Bible, how God has put his glory on the whole of life. Is there a more wonderful reality for us to consider together?”

Ray Ortlund, Lead Pastor, Immanuel Church, Nashville, Tennessee

“This biblical theology of biblical spirituality is the best I’ve read. As a bonus you get a survey of various forms of spirituality in the Christian tradition, especially within evangelicalism. If you want to see how biblical theology works and what biblical spirituality is, read this book.”

Donald S. Whitney, Associate Dean and Professor of Biblical Spirituality, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Praying the Bible*

“As one who has spent my life helping people with the practical side of spiritual growth, I am deeply grateful for a strong and clear guide to the theology of growth! Your own growth and the growth of those you lead will be strengthened by the truths in *Biblical Spirituality*.”

Tom Holladay, Teaching Pastor, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California; author, *Putting It Together Again* and *The Relationship Principles of Jesus*

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BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

Christopher W. Morgan, editor

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WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Biblical Spirituality

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Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Nathan A. Finn, “Spiritualities in the Christian Tradition” (chap. 8), adapted from *Spirituality for the Sent* edited by Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitfield. Copyright © 2017. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515, USA. www.ivpress.com.

Gregg R. Allison, “Spiritual and Embodied Disciplines” (chap. 9), adapted from *NorthStar Theology* by Gregg R. Allison. Copyright 2017 by Sojourn Community Church. Used by permission of Sojourn Community Church.

Cover design: Studio Gearbox

Cover image: *Magdalene in the House of Simon the Pharisee*, by Giuseppe Tortelli, oil on canvas / Mondadori Portfolio / Electa / Adolfo Bezzi / Bridgeman Images

First printing 2019

Printed in the United States of America

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Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-4788-1

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-4791-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-4789-8

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-4790-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Morgan, Christopher W., 1971- editor.
Title: Biblical spirituality / Christopher W. Morgan, editor.
Description: Wheaton : Crossway, 2019. | Series: Theology in community series | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018050404 (print) | LCCN 2019014496 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433547898 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433547904 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433547911 (epub) | ISBN 9781433547881 (tp)
Subjects: LCSH: Spirituality—Biblical teaching.
Classification: LCC BS680.S7 (ebook) | LCC BS680.S7 B525 2019 (print) | DDC 248—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018050404>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

CH 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Shelley and Chelsey,
I could not be more blessed as a husband and dad. I love you!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology

PNTC	Pelican New Testament Commentaries
SBET	<i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SBJT	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
ThTo	<i>Theology Today</i>
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

SERIES PREFACE

As the series name, *Theology in Community*, indicates, theology in community aims to promote clear thinking on and godly responses to historic and contemporary theological issues. The series examines issues central to the Christian faith, including traditional topics such as sin, the atonement, the church, and heaven, but also some which are more focused or contemporary, such as suffering and the goodness of God, the glory of God, the deity of Christ, and the kingdom of God. The series strives not only to follow a sound theological method but also to display it. Chapters addressing the Old and New Testaments on the book's subject form the heart of each volume. Subsequent chapters synthesize the biblical teaching and link it to historical, philosophical, systematic, and pastoral concerns. Far from being mere collections of essays, the volumes are carefully crafted so that the voices of the various experts combine to proclaim a unified message. Again, as the name suggests, theology in community also seeks to demonstrate that theology should be done in teams. The teachings of the Bible were forged in real-life situations by leaders in God's covenant communities. The biblical teachings addressed concerns of real people who needed the truth to guide their lives. Theology was formulated by the church and for the church. This series seeks to recapture that biblical reality. The volumes are written by scholars, from a variety of denominational backgrounds and life experiences with academic credentials and significant expertise across the spectrum of theological disciplines, who collaborate with each other. They write from a high view of Scripture with robust evangelical conviction and in a gracious manner. They are not detached academics but are personally involved in ministry, serving as teachers, pastors, and missionaries. The contributors to these volumes stand in continuity with the historic church, care about the global church, share life together with other believers in local churches, and aim to write for the good of the church to strengthen its leaders, particularly pastors, teachers, missionaries, lay leaders, students, and professors.

For the glory of God and the good of the church,

Christopher W. Morgan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

God has made us to love him and to love and live in community with one another. I am grateful for the people that God has placed in my life to shape me and my thinking. There are too many to mention all of them, but I want to express gratitude to those who have made an impact on this project:

- Dr. Tony Chute and Dr. Greg Cochran, for your friendship, partnership, and leadership in CBU's School of Christian Ministries.
- Gary McDonald, for sharing life together and excelling in grace and generosity.
- SoCal Baptist Ministries, Phil Kell, and the California Baptist Foundation, for your wonderful generosity and support.
- Dr. Milton Higgins, for your warm love, prayers, and generosity.
- Dr. Ron Ellis, Dr. Chuck Sands, Kent Dacus, the trustees, and the administration at California Baptist University, for your vision and support.
- CBU's School of Christian Ministries' faculty, for your friendship and your resolve to exalt the Lord, serve churches, and invest in students.
- Maigen Turner, my administrative assistant, for your positive attitude, proficient work, and eagerness to help.
- Students at California Baptist University, for your desire to grow in God's Word to serve his church.
- Lydia Brownback and Elliott Pinegar, for your superb editorial help.
- The whole Crossway team, for your encouragement, service, and work to bless God's people.

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A TRAJECTORY OF SPIRITUALITY

CHRISTOPHER W. MORGAN
AND JUSTIN L. MCLENDON



“A prominent feature of our times is the robust revival of spirituality.”¹ Bruce Demarest is right, and we do not have to look far for reasons to explain this renewed interest. Whether it is a reaction to society’s downward moral and ethical spiral, dissatisfaction with formal religion, the lingering residue of postmodernism, or a host of other factors, we are witnessing a renewed interest in all things spiritual. For some, spirituality means the latest self-help literature or a generic sense of self-improvement through diet, exercise, meditation, or some sort of spiritual contemplation. Others think of major religious traditions or, more commonly, a Western synthesis of these traditions into innumerable spiritualized alternatives that can be viewed in either religious or nonreligious terms and practices.

But what does the Bible say about spirituality? How should we begin discussing the matter of spirituality with biblical and theological focus? The answer is more difficult to ascertain than we might first suppose. Talk of spirituality can be vague and loose, detached from Scripture while appearing biblical, and so clarity is crucial as we consider formation and our spiritual journeys. D. A. Carson insightfully links true Christian spirituality to the gospel, urging us to work outward from that center.² Our understanding of spirituality must have its roots in the gospel, its moorings in biblical theology, and its focus in theology. These theological roots do not create a cold, lifeless orthodoxy unengaged with the Spirit’s

¹ Bruce Demarest, *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, ed. Bruce Demarest (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 11. Demarest’s introductory essay cogently surveys current research and practices of the recent increase in spirituality.

² D. A. Carson, “When Is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition,” *JETS* 37 (Sept. 1994): 381–94.

active work in our daily lives but actually ground the life-transforming work of the Spirit in the Word while protecting the legitimacy of our spiritual longings and practices. Carson highlights the moral and ethical necessities of living by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and of understanding how the Spirit enables and empowers us to live purposefully so that we can approach what Carson calls an “all-of-life approach to spirituality—every aspect of human existence, personal and corporate, brought under the discipline of the Word of God, brought under the consciousness that we live in the presence of God, by his grace and for his glory.”³ J. I. Packer proposes similar bearings:

I want to see a focused vision of spiritual maturity—the expansion of the soul is the best phrase I can use for it. That is, a renewed sense of the momentousness of being alive, the sheer bigness and awesomeness of being a human being alive in God’s world with light, with grace, with wisdom, with responsibility, with biblical truth.⁴

Indeed, we seek *biblical* spirituality, “a renewed sense of the momentousness of being alive in God’s world” as God’s people led by God’s Spirit through God’s Word unto godly, Christlike character—all for God’s mission by God’s grace and for God’s glory.

The Bible portrays this spiritual pilgrimage widely and often, referring to it as walking with God, walking in God’s ways, worship, holiness, obedience, discipleship, following Christ, life in the Spirit, maturity, and sanctification. The Bible portrays our spiritual pilgrimage as requiring grace-given faith, love, growth, diligence, repentance, prayer, commitment, intentionality, and discipline. Our spiritual pilgrimage is depicted as personal and as life together in the body of Christ. Our spiritual growth is also gradual, as Paul prays that the love of Philippian believers would “abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9–11).

As the Bible relates these truths, it offers us something of a trajectory of our spiritual journey. Beginning with man’s being created in the image of God and culminating in the ultimate glory of God, the trajectory of our spiritual journey develops

³ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁴ Wendy Murray Zoba, “Knowing Packer: The Lonely Journey of a Passionate Puritan,” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 1998), 40.

- the image of God: created for spirituality
- fallen man: the distortion of our spirituality
- Christ's saving work: the basis of our spirituality
- new life: the beginning of our spirituality
- the triune God: the source of our spirituality
- Christlikeness: the goal of our spirituality
- love: the focus of our spirituality
- the church: the community of our spirituality
- ordinary life: the context of our spirituality
- indwelling sin and temptation: obstacles in our spirituality
- the already and the not yet: tensions in our spirituality
- Word, prayer, and church: means for our spirituality
- reproducing disciples: the mission of our spirituality
- the glory of God: the ultimate end of our spirituality
- the grace of God: fuel for our journey.

The Image of God: Created for Spirituality

The story of our spirituality can be found only within the biblical storyline, which starts suddenly: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Already in existence prior to matter, space, or time, the eternal, self-existent God creates the universe and all that exists. God "creates, says, sees, separates, names, makes, appoints, blesses, finishes, makes holy, and rests."⁵ God creates out of nothing, forms it according to his purposes, and fills it with plants and animals. God is not like other gods of the ancient Near East. Gordon Wenham observes: "God is without peer and competitor. He does not have to establish his power in struggle with other members of a polytheistic pantheon. The sun and moon are his handiwork, not his rivals."⁶ The true God is not the sky, sun, moon, water, trees, animals, or anything else created; God creates them, and they are subject to him. The creation is neither God nor a part of God; he is absolute and has independent existence, and creation has derived existence from him and continually depends on him as its sustainer (cf. Acts 17:25–28). The transcendent Creator is a king who accomplishes his will by his word and names the elements of his creation (Gen. 1:5).

The Creator is also personal. On each day of creation God is personally involved in every detail, crafting them in a way that pleases him and benefits his creatures. On the sixth day, he personally creates man in his own image, breathing life into him. The personal God has made

⁵C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 71.

⁶Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 37–38.

humans to be personal as well, with the ability to relate to him, live in community with one another, and have dominion over creation. As Carson reminds, “We are accorded with an astonishing dignity” and have “implanted within us a profound capacity for knowing God intimately.”⁷ By creating us in his image, God distinguishes us from the rest of creation and establishes that he is distinct from us—we are not gods but creatures made in his image.

God’s goodness is reflected in the goodness of his creation and reinforced in the steady refrain, “And God saw that it was good” (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25; see also 1:4), even “very good” (1:31). Material creation reflects God’s goodness, which is evident also in his generous provisions of light, land, vegetation, animals, and “creeping” things. These are blessings given for humanity’s benefit, as are the ability to relate to God, fertility to procreate, and authority to use the abundant provisions for man’s own good. By the seventh day, God has finished his creative work, rests, and blesses and sanctifies the day as holy, as a Sabbath to be kept. In doing so, God displays his joy and satisfaction in his creation, his celebration of completion, and he commemorates this special event.⁸

Genesis 2:4–25 focuses on God’s formation of man and woman and his provision of the garden of Eden as a place for them in which to live and work.⁹ As Allen Ross summarizes, “God has prepared human beings, male and female, with the spiritual capacity and communal assistance to serve him and to keep his commands so that they might live and enjoy the bounty of his creation.”¹⁰ Man is formed from the dust of the ground but is more than dust—his life comes directly from the very breath of God (2:7). In planting the garden and moving man there, the Creator and covenant Lord provides a wonderful and sacred space for humans to enjoy a harmonious relationship with him, each other, the animals, and the land. The garden highlights God’s presence with man. God establishes the terms for living in his presence and graciously puts forward only one prohibition: man shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Contrary to what might be expected, man is allowed to eat of the tree of life (which confers immortality) but not of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (which gives access to wisdom), “for that leads to . . .

⁷D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 205.

⁸Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 114.

⁹Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 39, 101.

¹⁰Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 127.

an independence of the creator incompatible with the trustful relationship between man and his maker which the story presupposes.”¹¹ Because God’s generosity to man is so abundant, his prohibition would not seem difficult to accept.

God lovingly notices that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (2:18) and generously meets man’s need by creating woman as a complementary and intimate companion united with him for life together. Genesis 2 ends positively and, given the beliefs of ancient Israel, surprisingly: “The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (2:25). In the garden, nakedness is not reason for shame but points to the man and woman’s innocence and the unspoiled delight they have in each other.¹²

The good God creates a good world for the good of his creatures. Humans too are created good and blessed beyond measure, being made in God’s image, with an unhindered relationship with God, and with freedom. In the beginning, God creates humans in his image and designs them for spirituality—to enjoy a loving and personal relationship with the covenant Lord, as well as holistic relationships with themselves, one another, and creation.

Fallen Man: The Distortion of Our Spirituality

Against this pristine backdrop, Genesis 3 recounts a tempter who calls into question God’s truthfulness, sovereignty, and goodness. The tempter is “crafty” and deflects the woman’s attention away from the covenantal relationship God has established.¹³ Sadly, in 3:6 she saw, she took, she ate, and she gave, which culminates in “he ate.” Wenham observes that the midpoint of 3:6–8, “and he ate,” employs the key verb of the narrative, “eat,” and is placed between the woman’s inflated expectations for eating (good to eat, delight to the eyes, and giving insight) and its actual effects: eyes opened, knowing they were nude, and hiding in the trees.¹⁴ The contrast is striking: the forbidden fruit did not deliver what the tempter promised but brought new dark realities warned of by the good and truthful covenant Lord.

This initial act of human rebellion brings divine justice: “They sinned by eating, and so would suffer to eat; she led her husband to sin, and so would be mastered by him; they brought pain into the world by their

¹¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 87.

¹² *Ibid.*, 88; Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 139.

¹³ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 171.

¹⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 75.

disobedience, and so would have painful toil in their respective lives.”¹⁵ Collins adds:

There are small ironic wordplays. . . . For example, in Genesis 3:5 the serpent promises that the humans’ eyes will be *opened* and they will *know* something, while in verse 7 it is fulfilled: their eyes were *opened* and they *knew* something—but it was just that they were naked! . . . Similarly, there is a play between the use of the root *r-b-h* in 3:16 (“I will surely *multiply* your pain in childbearing”) and its use in the commission of 1:28 (“Be fruitful and *multiply*”). Whereas procreation had previously been the sphere of blessing, now it is to be the area of pain and danger.¹⁶

The consequences of their sin are suitable and shattering. The couple feels shame, realizing they are naked (3:7). They sense their estrangement from God, even foolishly trying to hide from him (3:8–10). They are fearful of God and how he might respond (3:9–10). Their alienation from each other also emerges, as the woman blames the serpent, while the man blames the woman and, by insinuation, even God (3:10–13). Pain and sorrow also arise. The woman experiences pain in childbirth, the man toils in trying to grow food in a land with pests and weeds, and both discover conflict in their relationship (3:15–19). Even worse, the couple is banished from Eden and God’s glorious presence (3:22–24).

How they wish they had listened to God’s warning that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would “surely die” (2:17)! And die they do. They die spiritually, and their bodies also begin to experience gradual decay that will lead ultimately to their physical death, as God’s judgment states: “To dust you shall return” (3:19).

Most devastating of all is that these consequences befall not only Adam and Eve but extend to their descendants as well. Robert Pyne describes the dismal scene:

Standing together east of Eden [Adam and Eve] each felt alone—betrayed by the other, alienated from God, and confused about how it had all come apart so quickly. . . .

The children were all born outside of Eden. . . . None of them ever saw the tree of life or had a chance to taste or reject the forbidden fruit. At the same time, none of them enjoyed marriage relationships without some degree of rivalry or resentment, and they inevitably ate bread pro-

¹⁵Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 148.

¹⁶Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 169, emphasis original.

duced by the sweat of their brow. Born in a fallen world, they knew only the curse, never Eden. Still they knew that this was not the way life was supposed to be. . . .

Adam and Even sinned alone, but they were not the only ones locked out of the Garden. Cut off from the tree of life, they and their descendants were all destined to die.¹⁷

So, in the beginning, God created a good cosmos with good humans who enjoyed good relationships with him, themselves, one another, and creation itself. But then sin entered the picture and brought disruption and alienation in each human relationship—with God, oneself, one another, and creation. Yet humans are still in the image of God, blessed by God, and commanded to be fruitful and multiply as recipients of God’s presence, promise, and grace.

Nevertheless, in Adam sin entered the picture and has brought disruption and alienation in each of our human relationships—with God, self, one another, and creation. Adam sinned not merely as the first bad example but as the representative of all humanity. In its contrast of Adam’s and Christ’s representation of us, Romans 5:12–21 stresses that in Adam there was sin, death, and condemnation. In Adam was the old era, the dominion of sin and death. Note the outcomes of Adam’s representative trespass:¹⁸

- “many died” because of his sin (v. 15);
- his sin “brought condemnation” to all (v. 16);
- “death reigned” over all human beings (v. 17);
- all people were condemned because of his one trespass (v. 18); and
- by virtue of his sin “many were made sinners” (v. 19).

Note also four particular effects resulting from Adam’s sin and representation:

- many/all were made sinners (v. 19);¹⁹
- many/all died (v. 15);
- condemnation is upon all (v. 16, 18); and
- death reigned over all humans (v. 17).

Thus, in Adam all are sinners; all die; all are under the domain of death;

¹⁷Robert A. Pyne, *Humanity and Sin* (Dallas: Word, 1999), 162.

¹⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 268.

¹⁹Paul does not set “many” in comparison with “all,” nor vice versa. Rather, he contrasts Adam’s one act with the widespread effects of that sin upon humanity, “many.” Likewise, Paul contrasts Christ’s act with its incalculable effects on “many.” Paul uses “all” similarly here. For example, many die and all die.

all are condemned.²⁰ Because of the fall, our spirituality is distorted and our relationship with God is now characterized by hostility, guilt, and condemnation.

Christ's Saving Work: The Basis of Our Spirituality

Thankfully, sin is no match for God's grace, showcased especially in Christ's saving work.

"Christianity is a rescue religion," says John Stott, and the totality of Christ's work, from eternity past to our future hope, supports every aspect of our spirituality.²¹ Christ's saving work refers to "all that Christ did when he came to this earth 'for us and our salvation,' all that he continues to do now that he is risen from the dead and at God's right hand, and all that he will do when he returns in glory at the end of the age."²²

In the fullness of time, God the Son entered human history to "redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5). Our advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, knew no sin, yet he became sin so that "in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). He offered himself as our propitiation, defeating our sin through his substitutionary death and triumphing over death through his victorious resurrection.²³ We are sons and daughters of the risen and exalted King, and "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Our collective cry is in praise to God for Christ's victory over sin and death; we are no longer slaves but sons and daughters, heirs of God (Gal. 4:5–7). As Paul claims, "Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom. 8:34). Paul's "more than that" acknowledges Jesus' work on both sides of the empty tomb. His sinless life, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, exaltation, and more ground our spirituality, including such blessings as justification, forgiveness, righteousness, peace with God, and "access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:2).

²⁰Rom. 3:9–20 teaches similarly: we are all "under sin" (v. 9); "none is righteous, no, not one" (v. 10); every mouth will be stopped (v. 19); the whole world will be judged guilty before God (v. 19); and no human being will be justified by the works of the law (v. 20). Eph. 2:1–3 also underlines the universality of sin, guilt, and death. Apart from Christ, we all are in the state of spiritual death. This is characterized by the lifestyle that flows from this state as well as those who are mired in this state's being called "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath." Sin and guilt are universal. Apart from Christ, spiritual death is our state. For more on our sin, see Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

²¹John Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 81.

²²Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 18–19.

²³This section especially draws from Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

New Life: The Beginning of Our Spirituality

Christ died for us—the ungodly, sinners, his enemies—that we might be right with him and have spiritual life (Rom. 5:6, 8, 11). Note the outcomes of Christ’s representative work:

- his grace and gift abounded for many (v. 15);
- his grace brought “justification” whereas Adam introduced “condemnation” (v. 16);
- instead of death’s reigning, believers now “reign in life” by virtue of the grace of Jesus Christ (v. 17);
- the righteous act of Jesus Christ brought “justification and life” for all (v. 18);
- through Christ’s obedience the many are now “made righteous” (v. 19).

In Christ there is righteousness, life, and justification. In Christ there is a new reign, marked by grace and life. In Christ, the spiritually guilty find righteousness; the spiritually dead find life. In Christ, grace abounds—in our justification (5:12–21) and in our sanctification (6:1–14).

All journeys have a beginning, and our Christian spirituality begins with this new life in Christ. Jesus assures that all who hear his word and believe have the eternal life he grants, which leads to a passing from death to life (John 5:25). Jesus’ words to Nicodemus underline our need for this new life: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (John 3:3, 7). To be born again means to receive new life in Christ, as John Murray explains:

God effects a change which is radical and all-pervasive, a change which cannot be explained in terms of any combination, permutation, or accumulation of human resources, a change which is nothing less than a new creation by him who calls the things that be not as they were, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. This, in a word, is regeneration.²⁴

Put similarly:

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God’s grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.²⁵

²⁴John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 96.

²⁵See “Salvation,” in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. See also Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 106–7.

With repentance from sin, and faith in Christ, comes our justification, in which God, through the sinless life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection of Christ, forgives us of our sin, grants Christ's righteousness to us, and judicially declares us righteous. In Christ, our sins are forgiven, our status is righteous, and our new identity is formed: we are the children of God, adopted into God's covenant family as heirs of the kingdom.²⁶

The trajectory of our spirituality begins with our own spiritual death. God acts on our behalf, for our good and for his glory, to rescue us through Christ and his saving work. He gives us new life/birth in Christ, fosters our repentance and faith, declares us righteous in Christ, and adopts us into his family. But God's work on our behalf has not concluded. Using familial language, Peter expresses God's purpose to sanctify us: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:14–16).

This sanctification is both definitive and progressive. Definitive (or initial) sanctification is the Holy Spirit's work of setting sinful men and women apart as holy in Christ, constituting them as saints. Paul addresses the Corinthian church, certainly not the epitome of holiness, as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1:2). The Corinthian believers were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified"—past tense (6:11). We already are holy as saints. And yet we are growing in holiness and must rely on the Spirit to live up to our new identity. This is called "progressive sanctification." Thomas Schreiner relates the two:

For Paul, then, sanctification usually refers to the definitive work by which God has set apart believers in the realm of the holy in Christ Jesus. This eschatological work is accomplished at conversion, so that believers can be said to be holy or sanctified in God's presence. Still, Paul recognizes the need for growth in holiness and that transformation is a process (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), since complete sanctification and holiness will not be granted until Christ returns. Believers are already holy in Christ, and yet the fullness of that holiness will not be theirs until the day of redemption.²⁷

So the trajectory of our spirituality begins with our new life in Christ, received by faith, in which we are born again; are justified, adopted, and

²⁶ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 207.

²⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 375–76.

made holy; and increasingly grow in holiness. This work, from first to last, is a triune work of love.

The Triune God: The Source of Our Spirituality

Ephesians 1 praises the Father for heaping spiritual blessings upon us: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (1:3). God is the source of all our spiritual blessings. He has blessed us to the praise of his “glorious grace” (1:6) and for his “glory” (1:12, 14). This passage celebrates the work of the three persons of the Trinity in salvation. The Father’s election leads to our holiness and adoption (1:4–5). The Son’s redemption brings our forgiveness (1:7). The Father seals believers’ union with Christ by giving us the Holy Spirit as that seal, guaranteeing final salvation (1:13–14). All three persons work to save us, and they work in harmony. The result is continuity in God’s people: the Father chooses, the Son redeems, and the Spirit seals.

Notice how Paul stresses that all this occurs in Christ. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (1:3). We are chosen in Christ, holy in Christ, and adopted in Christ. Our redemption is in Christ, our forgiveness is in Christ, the purpose of God’s will is in Christ, and final cosmic reconciliation is in Christ. Our inheritance is in Christ, our hope is in Christ, and our faith is in Christ. God has blessed us “in the Beloved” (1:6).

What Christ has accomplished for us is now applied to us through our union with him. The Father is the author of salvation, the Son the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit the one who joins people to the Son in salvation. The Father plans salvation, the Son accomplishes it, and the Spirit applies it to believers. The Spirit is thus the person of the Trinity who unites us to Christ. Union with Christ, then, is the Holy Spirit’s work of joining believers to Christ, so that all his saving benefits become ours.²⁸

The Holy Spirit is our daily help as we live out the realities of our union with Christ. We need a grand goal, proper motivation, and solid content on which to build our lives. But more fundamentally, we need life, which comes from the Spirit’s uniting us to Christ. And we need the power that flows from Christ’s life, which the Spirit also links to us. The New Testament portrays the power for Christian living in three ways. First, it simply calls it “power.” Paul prays for the Ephesians to know the “immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe” (1:19). He

²⁸For more on union with Christ, see Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

extols this power as that which raised Christ from the dead and which he now exercises at God's right hand, above all things and with everything under his feet (vv. 19–23). It is no wonder that Paul describes God's power as the "working of his great might" (v. 19).²⁹

A second way in which Scripture speaks of the power driving the Christian life is as enabling grace. We underestimate God's grace by limiting it to initial saving grace (Eph. 2:8–9), because grace is also our ongoing power to serve God. Paul asserts, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). This initial saving grace made Paul, at that time an enemy of Christ, into an apostle. Paul states that he worked harder than any of the other apostles and then clarifies, "though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (15:10). God's enabling grace energized Paul to serve the Lord and bear fruit (15:11). Paul also speaks of enabling grace when he tells of his experience of receiving a thorn in the flesh so that he would not become puffed up (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul asked the Lord three times to remove the thorn, but God denied his requests, explaining, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). "Grace" is parallel with God's "power," and it is God's grace that fortifies Paul to overcome despite weaknesses. Because of God's enabling grace, the apostle can say: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10).

A third way of viewing the power we need to live for Christ is to speak of the power of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament often associates the Holy Spirit with God's power. The same Spirit who empowered Jesus in his earthly ministry (Acts 10:38) also worked as he made atonement (Heb. 9:14). The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 1:4) strengthens us to live for him. The same Spirit who applied salvation to us by enabling us to embrace the gospel (1 Thess. 1:5), regenerating us (Titus 3:5), and justifying us (1 Cor. 6:11), gives us power to serve Christ.

The empowering Holy Spirit works both inside and outside of God's people. He works within to grant spiritual gifts to us (1 Cor. 12:11), enabling us to grow in holiness (Rom. 8:13), to "abound in hope" (15:13), and to gain strength and encouragement (Eph. 3:16). The Spirit also works outside of us to deliver us from difficult circumstances (Phil. 1:19), to empower us for witness (Acts 1:8), and to produce fruit from our evangelistic efforts (Rom. 15:18–19).

The Father providentially guides us as his people through difficult circumstances in order to build holiness into our lives; he disciplines us

²⁹See John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 924–32.

“for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Heb. 12:10). In unparalleled love, the Son of God died on the cross to sanctify us: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (Eph. 5:25–26). As we have seen, the Holy Spirit plays a major role in sanctification: “God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). In love, each Trinitarian person works to promote our holiness.

Although God alone initiates salvation due to our spiritual helplessness, it is clear that we have an active role in the Christian life. Jesus exhorts: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (John 15:4). Paul urges us “by the mercies of God . . . to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1). And Peter admonishes: “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

Our spirituality, therefore, is the work of the Trinity in and through us. Paul commands us to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). But the Christian life is not a self-help project, as Paul’s next words show: “For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (v. 13). God is the Lord who saves, keeps, and works in us. Yet we labor for him who saved us by his grace. And we do so by his mighty power, “struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within [us]” (Col. 1:29).

Christlikeness: The Goal of Our Spirituality

Our triune God breathes spiritual life into us. We who were alienated are now united to Christ, the perfect image of God, and in this union we know and love him. Union with Christ is a legal, judicial, and actual union producing life. In our union with Christ, we echo in our embodied state our purpose to image Christ through worship and devotion, through word and deed. Ivor Davidson notes:

Responsible Christian talk of salvation is inseparable from responsible Christian talk of God. To speak rightly of God is to speak on the basis of God’s initiative in turning towards us; that turning is God’s restoration of fellowship with us, his overcoming of the distance that has come to exist between estranged creatures and their creator. The genesis of this movement lies exclusively in God’s mercy, in the majestic goodness with which God determines that the alienated should not be forever lost, that those who have chosen death should not perish, that all things should

find their due end in relation to their maker. In the gratuitousness of his outreach, God bestows not mere data but *himself*, enabling us to know him as he is, establishing the conditions within which creaturely apprehension of his character can and does occur.³⁰

In our union with Christ, he is at work in and through us to cultivate and change us into people who reflect his character and his ways.

Thus the goal of our Christian life is Christlikeness, and our ambition is to conform to the image of Christ. Romans 8:29 stresses that God's purpose is to conform us to this image of his Son. Second Corinthians 3:18 elaborates: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

In *The Disciplines of Grace*, Jerry Bridges comments on Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, unpacking Paul's reference to our being transformed and conformed to Christ and not to the world:

Both words, *transformed* and *conformed*, have a common root, *form*, meaning a pattern or a mold. "Being transformed" refers to the process; "conformed" refers to the finished product. Jesus is our pattern or mold. We are being transformed so that we will eventually be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. Sanctification or holiness (the words are somewhat interchangeable), then, is conformity to the likeness of Jesus Christ.³¹

Bridges offers a practical test we can employ to determine if we are growing in our transformation: we evaluate Jesus' character against our own actions as we pursue Christlikeness.

Such Christlikeness is immensely practical. God's grace teaches us to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions" and to pursue "self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" as we await the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11–13). Christlikeness, or godliness, is the goal: "Train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7).

Christlikeness is also intensely personal. Indeed, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22–23). When the Spirit unites us to Christ, he gives new life, which produces fruit—a display of our new life of goodness. He produces in us Christlikeness/godliness. By connecting us to Jesus' obe-

³⁰Ivor J. Davidson, "Salvation's Destiny: Heirs of God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (New York: Ashgate, 2001), 155.

³¹Jerry Bridges, *The Disciplines of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 98; emphasis original.

dient life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection, the Spirit produces the very character of Jesus himself. To be sure, he is always the Creator, and we are always the creatures; he is always the vine, and we are always the branches (John 15). As such, in Christ our lives are increasingly characterized by his character and life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, etc.

Further, Christlikeness is ecclesial. When Paul spoke to the church at Ephesus, he stressed traits that God's people should embody over the totality of their lives. These marks—unity, universality, holiness, truth, love—communicate and reflect God's goodness, which is why such attributes are sometimes called God's communicable attributes. The church bears these marks precisely because the church displays God's goodness in its collective pursuit of Christlikeness. And while God's perfections cannot be fully communicated to or through creatures, through his gracious self-communication and self-condescension the church can still truthfully and genuinely display our great and glorious God.³²

The marks of God's "display people" characterize both the church as a whole and also the local, visible church. And while the marks already do to some extent characterize the visible church, we are exhorted to maintain unity, to live in accord with holiness, to teach truth, and to embody love. We are to live up to our high calling, and in so doing we showcase God. As such, the marks of the church both display who we are as the church and how we are to live accordingly. Ephesians regularly points to this already/not yet (and indicative-imperative) aspect of the church. As the church, we already are the fullness of Christ (1:23), and yet we long to be filled with the fullness of Christ (3:19) as we seek the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13).³³ As the church, we already are the one new humanity (2:14–18), and yet we are to attain unto a mature humanity (4:13) and put on the new humanity (4:20–24). As the church, we already are under our head, Christ (1:22–23), and yet we are to grow up into Christ, who is the head (4:15). As the church, we already are one, united in Christ (2:12–22; 4:1–6), and yet we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:3). We already are holy (2:19–22), and yet we walk in holiness, put on the new humanity and holiness, become more

³² For more on how the church displays God, see Christopher W. Morgan, "The Church and the Glory of God," in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed. Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013), 213–35.

³³ For how the already and not yet relates to the church as temple, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 392–93.

and more holy, and one day will be ultimately presented to Christ as holy (4:20–24; 5:2–21, 27). As the church, we already are grounded in truth and built on Christ as the cornerstone, with the apostles and prophets as the foundation (2:19–22), and yet we are to teach truth, speak truth in love, walk in truth, and stand firm as an army with truth (4:5, 11, 14–15, 21; 6:10–18). As the church, we are glorious now, as the fullness of Christ (1:22–23), and yet one day we will be presented to Christ as glorious (5:25–28). Thus, as the church, we are the community of God’s people living in the already and not yet. We display God and the realities of the new creation. We are currently marked by godliness—goodness, unity, holiness, truth, and love—and yet we increasingly pursue godliness as well.

Love: The Focus of Our Spirituality

As we have seen, new life in Christ is the beginning of our spirituality, the triune God is the source of our spirituality, and Christlikeness is the goal of our spirituality. Now we turn to the focus of our spirituality: love.³⁴ In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul points to his readers’ highest spiritual aspirations and then turns the tables on them (vv. 1–3). To experience spiritual gifts beyond measure, to have faith that leads to miracles, to know truth as exhaustively as it can be known, to give everything to the poor, or to be willing to die as a martyr for the gospel—to reach all of these, but to do them without “having love,” is worthless: “I am nothing” (v. 2); “I gain nothing” (v. 3). Even radical spirituality without love is worthless.

Then, in verses 4–7, Paul points us to true spirituality, which at its core is true Christian love. He does not so much define love as describe and personify it as a person who thinks and acts. And though the content of this passage is indeed suitable for wedding ceremonies and the like, Paul originally wrote this to address real-life problems of the Corinthian church. He warns that the Corinthians’ approach to religion is warped and portrays love as what is “central, characteristic, and irreplaceable in biblical Christianity.”³⁵

Indeed, from the other parts of the letter we find that the clear failure of the Corinthians was their failure to love. Some were impatient and unkind, filled with jealous ambition and egos, and puffed up. They in-

³⁴For more on love, see Christopher W. Morgan, ed., *The Love of God*, *Theology in Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). The comments in this section are shaped by the following works on 1 Corinthians 13: Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*; D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987); Ajith Fernando, *Reclaiming Love: Radical Relationships in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); Michael Green, *To Corinth with Love* (Dallas: Word, 1988).

³⁵Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 66.

sisted on their own way and were argumentative and resentful. Some rejoiced in wrong rather than in righteousness (chap. 5). Others promoted themselves rather than seeking to promote the good of the overall body. Instead of humbly serving others, they humiliated others. Instead of transcending the social class system, they highlighted it. Instead of following Jesus' example of service, love, and sacrifice for the good of others, they used the symbol of his sacrifice for self-promotion. Instead of viewing their spiritual gifts as a God-given means to strengthen the church, they boasted of their superior knowledge and spirituality. As David Garland notes, "Although the gifts of the Spirit are conspicuous in their assembly, their lack of love is even more conspicuous."³⁶

So Paul describes love by its response to others in the church. If we truly love, we will be:

- patient: we will endure suffering and difficult people (6:7);
- kind: we will be tender—Paul often links kindness with forgiveness (Eph. 4:32);
- not jealous/envious: we will want the best for others, not wishing that the successes of others were only ours (1 Cor. 3:3);
- not boasting/vainglorious: we will be unpretentious, not promoting ourselves so that others would praise us (1:17; 2:1);
- not proud/puffed up (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1): we will be humble, not arrogant;
- not indecent/shameful/rude (5:1–2): we will be pure, not immoral;
- not insisting on our own way (10:24, 33; cf. Phil. 2:3–4): we will be generous, not self-seeking;
- not irritable: we will be long-suffering, not given to fits of anger;
- not resentful/keeping records of offenses: we will have a forgiving spirit and be not easily offended (1 Cor. 6:7: "Why not suffer wrong?");
- not rejoicing over injustice: we will support justice, not wrongdoing;
- rejoicing in the truth: we will delight in and endorse truth;
- bearing all things: we will put up with all things;
- believing all things: we will be generously trusting, not suspicious or cynical (this does not mean we are gullible);
- hoping all things: we hope for the best and are not pessimistic about others;
- enduring all things: we will persevere in love.

These descriptions show that the particular expressions of our love will vary to meet the needs of the context. In the context of frustrating circumstances and people, our love appears as patience. In the context of the successes of others, love does not allow us to envy but leads us to

³⁶Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 616–17.

rejoice with those who rejoice. In the context of our own successes, love restrains us from self-promotion and leads to humility. In the context of someone's sin against us, love appears as forgiveness and not as a keeping track of wrongs. The Bible depicts our love for others as expressed also in sharing the gospel, caring for the poor, helping the marginalized, building the faith of others, promoting unity in the church, teaching truth, correcting error, urging repentance, and more.

These descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13 affirm the emphasis on love as desiring the good of others and as giving of ourselves for their sake. Such love provides focus and clarity to the trajectory of our spirituality.

The Church: The Community of Our Spirituality

Some of the people we love misunderstand our love, reject it, or even despise it. God uses this to teach us more love, particularly developing our patience, forgiveness, and endurance. Thankfully, though, most in the body of Christ receive our love, appreciate it, return it, and even pass it on by loving others. We can rejoice, knowing not only that the loving God loves us and transforms us by his love into people of love, but also that his very love is extending to us and leading to our love to him as well as to our love for others. The God of love also loves others and transforms them into people of love, and his very love extends out to others and leads to their love for him and even to us as well. God's love has ripple effects. His very love is extending to us through the love of others, and his very love is extending still to others through our love. And on and on it goes, as the God-glorifying process of his self-giving love spirals forward in and through his people!

As such, the church is the community of our spirituality. Herman Bavinck stresses the communal aspect of Christian spirituality, explaining that we are "incorporated in a great whole, taken up into a rich fellowship . . . [as] a member of a new nation and citizen of a spiritual kingdom whose king is glorious in the multitude of his subjects."³⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks similarly: "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. . . . The ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone."³⁸

Ephesians helps us see that as the church, we are one new people, a

³⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 514.

³⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, English ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 38.

new humanity, a people called to display God to the world.³⁹ We are the new creation in the image of God, called to reflect Christ and embody God's character (2:14–16; 4:13, 24). As the church, we are composed of believers who were alienated from God and through the saving work of Christ have been united to Christ (2:1–10) and reconciled to each other (2:11–22). As the church, we preach Christ not only to humanity in the verbal proclamation of the gospel but also to the entire cosmos through the visible display of unity (3:9–12). Bryan Chapell explains:

This grafting of the redeemed is so amazing that it was God's intent to use it to display his wisdom to the heavenly beings. Thus Paul's words create a celestial stage to display the wonders of grace. . . . In union with other sinners made perfect, and as members of one body, we who come from every tribe and nation, people and personality, are on display as a church before the heavenly hosts as a testimony to the wisdom of God. . . . Just as Paul's sin makes the grace of God more apparent, the uniting of sinners in the body of Christ makes the grace of God more brilliant—even to the hosts of heaven. By our unity in Christ's body, the church, we are preaching to the angels about the power, wisdom, and glory of God who made us.

This is the apex of Paul's thought about the church. . . . Here we learn that the church is intended not only to transform the world but also to transfix heaven.⁴⁰

As we showcase God's eternal purpose of cosmic unity to the world, we demonstrate that the kingdom of God has already broken into history. God's eternal purpose of cosmic reconciliation is not perfectly realized yet—sin and injustice still occur. Yet sin will not have the last word; disorder and division will not last forever. Although the present age can still to some extent be characterized as “not the way things are supposed to be,”⁴¹ God will bring about a new creation.

What is so striking is that God's new creation is already underway in the church. The church is the firstfruits of the ultimate new creation still to come. As the firstfruits, we are both the genuine reality of the new creation and also the foretaste of more to come. Thus, as the church, we are the new humanity, new society, new temple—a new creation. We are a foretaste of heaven on earth, a genuine embodiment of the kingdom, a glimpse of the way things are supposed to be, and a glimpse of the way

³⁹ For more on the church, see Easley and Morgan, *The Community of Jesus*.

⁴⁰ Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 144–45.

⁴¹ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

the cosmos ultimately will be; we are a showcase of God's eternal plan of cosmic unity.

Thus, Paul asserts the fundamental unity of the people of God: there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one body, one faith, and one baptism (4:4–6). As the one body of Christ, we are to live out our high calling of oneness and to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). This unity exists amidst a very real diversity: “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7). Paul elaborates that this means that God has given the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (4:11). He gives people to the church, and he gives the church to people. We are given gifts to serve others, and others are given gifts to serve others, including us. As we serve, others grow and we grow. And as others serve, we grow and they grow. This is the community of our spirituality: life together as the church.

Our life together is guided by the historical and experiential reality of our union with Christ: “We are members one of another” (4:25). Because we are linked together as the community of Jesus, we speak and live truthfully with each other and refuse to nurse anger against each other (4:25–27). We refuse to steal but instead work hard so that we can share with others in the body who have need (4:28). We choose our words carefully because we realize that God gives grace to others through our words (4:29). We put away bitterness, anger, and slander and put on kindness, tenderness, forgiveness, and love (4:31–32). If Jesus loves and forgives us, who are we to detest and hold a grudge against his people? And if Jesus loves and forgives them, who are we to oppose Jesus’ people and thus our own spiritual family and body? Life together includes imitating Jesus and embracing his people as our own people (4:32–5:2). Bonhoeffer reminds us of the blessing it is that God gives us the church as the community of our spirituality:

Let those who until now have had the privilege of living a Christian life together with other Christians praise God’s grace from the bottom of their hearts. Let them thank God on their knees and realize: it is grace, nothing but grace, that we are still permitted to live in the community of Christians today.⁴²

Ordinary Life: The Context of Our Spirituality

While the church is the community of our spirituality, the normal context of our spirituality is ordinary life. When we think of spirituality, we may

⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

imagine a pastor's praying for the lost, a believer's retreat of solitude in the mountains, a relief worker's helping the poor in Africa, or a missionary's taking the gospel to unreached peoples. And all of these tasks can be spiritual. But we may forget that our spirituality is also cultivated in, and is manifested in, our rhythms of sleep and rest, our work, our roles as wives and husbands, our roles as children and parents, our physical bodies, and more (e.g., Eph. 4:1–6:9). The context of spirituality is seldom a spiritual retreat center. More often, it includes maintaining joy while driving in congested traffic, living ethically at work, loving our families, cleaning the house, helping children with homework, paying the bills, and forgiving our neighbor.

Such matters seem too ordinary to be significant, too commonplace to be the context of our spirituality. But life—all of life—is where we live out our faith. And since a large portion of our spirituality is forged in everyday normalcy, we must mobilize every effort to see each moment as an opportune time to live in the presence of God for the sake of others. We may miss the importance of the ordinary if we compartmentalize Christ to our Sunday morning gatherings or our quiet times.

Combatting the tendency to sequester Jesus into spiritual arenas as opposed to what are traditionally considered secular arenas requires a robust commitment to the lordship of Christ in all of life. As Vern Poythress states, “If he is Lord of all, he is Lord over business and work and education and science and home life.”⁴³ Our spirituality is an embodied one; we are the on-the-ground expressions of God's ongoing work begun in conversion. Deep down, we are aware that Christ's lordship must be all encompassing in our lives, but we invariably struggle with how to live this out faithfully. At its core, a robust embrace of the lordship of Christ relates directly to a comprehensive obedience to Christ and an overall life of worship (Rom. 12:1–2; Col. 3:1–4:6).

Michael Horton believes that American Christianity provides its own set of challenges to an ordinary Christian life. “American Christianity,” he writes, “is a story of perpetual upheavals in churches and individual lives. Starting with the extraordinary conversion experience, our lives are motivated by a constant expectation for The Next Big Thing. We're growing bored with the ordinary means of God's grace, attending church week in and week out.”⁴⁴ Instead of seeking the next best experience, ordinary

⁴³ Vern Poythress, *The Lordship of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 31.

⁴⁴ Michael Horton, *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 16.

Christian living should involve our daily dying to self as we seek to fulfill our responsibilities in our families, churches, and vocations; as we seek to love our neighbors with hospitality and presence. The lordship of Christ includes a daily commitment to do all things—yes, ordinary things—for the glory of Christ.

Indwelling Sin and Temptation: Obstacles in Our Spirituality

Ordinary life, as the context of our spirituality, is filled with blessings. God shines in all that is fair; his common grace abounds. The beauty of the sunset, the towering mountains, and a daughter's smile are all gifts from the Lord. But ordinary life is also filled with more danger than we think: the terrain of our trajectory is likened to a spiritual war zone, filled with temptation after temptation:

In every circumstance of life, every lot, every association, every labor, every pleasure or hardship, there is a possible temptation. There are temptations for the body, for the mind, for the soul. There are the temptations to the appetite, to selfishness, dishonesty, to the evasion of duty, the disregard of others' rights, indifference to others' sorrows; pride, sloth, envy, suspicion, taking up an evil report against our neighbor, and the subtle, but even more dangerous, temptations to doubt, to unbelief.⁴⁵

The world around us, however, is not for us but is dead set against us. As David Calhoun cautions, "The world entices us to fit in with, to adjust to, to experiment with, its values."⁴⁶

Ephesians 2 relates three opponent forces at work. Apart from Christ, we are "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:2–3). We were under the domain of two external forces: the course of the world and Satan. And we were under an internal force working in tandem with these external forces: our hearts, which were darkened by sin, under spiritual death, and following the trajectory of the world and Satan.

Thankfully, God intervened: "But God, being rich in mercy, because

⁴⁵ Clarence Edward Macartney, *The Lord's Prayer* (New York: Revell, 1942), 69. I first read this in David B. Calhoun, "Sin and Temptation," in Morgan and Peterson, *Fallen*, 244.

⁴⁶ Calhoun, "Sin and Temptation," 253.

of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:4–6). This salvation is by God’s grace and unto our holiness, as we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10).

This call to holiness requires a wartime mentality, in which we battle against those forces that held our former allegiance (Eph. 6:10–18). We know who we once were, and we now fight against the sin that so easily mastered us and the indwelling sin that still entangles us (Rom. 6:1–14; Heb. 12:1–2). We long to put off the old self and instead put on the new (Eph. 4:17–24), desiring sanctification, knowing that it is God’s will for us (1 Thess. 4:3). Packer puts it wonderfully: “Holiness is in essence obeying God, living to God and for God, imitating God, keeping his law, taking his side against sin, doing righteousness, performing good works, following Christ’s teaching and example, worshiping God in Spirit, loving and serving God and men out of reverence for Christ.”⁴⁷

This process of putting off/putting on and opposing sin/embracing godliness is continual. Because of this, the book of James urges perseverance and cautions us about the nature of temptation:

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:12–15)

God does not tempt us, but external temptation entices our internal desire, and this lust leads to sin, which leads to death (1:13–18; see also Proverbs 5, 7). Sin deceives, entices, conceives, develops, and finishes with death.⁴⁸ Temptation masks the fact that sin is destructive. The old adage reflects James’s teaching: sin takes us farther than we want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay, and costs us more than we want to pay. To discover temptation’s source, we should look within—at our own evil desires.⁴⁹ God

⁴⁷ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 81.

⁴⁸ John Owen, “Indwelling Sin,” in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 295–96.

⁴⁹ For more on James and temptation, see Christopher W. Morgan and B. Dale Ellenburg, *James: Wisdom for the Community*, Focus on the Bible Commentaries (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2008), 59–73.

is holy and never the source of temptations. God is not our foe but our covenant Lord. God is for us, not against us.

Here we find our hope: God is the source not of temptation but of “every good gift and every perfect gift,” including our holiness (James 1:17). God is our strength against indwelling sin and persistent temptations through the Spirit’s ongoing work of mortification. He enables us to fight sin, repent of sin, and walk in holiness, as John Owen explains: “He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.”⁵⁰

“Victory over temptation is not gained in the moment of temptation,” Calhoun advises. “It is won in the daily living of our redeemed lives. It is won as we ‘make every effort to supplement [our] faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love’ (2 Pet. 1:5–7).”⁵¹

The Already and the Not Yet: Tensions in Our Spirituality

As our experience of indwelling sin reminds us, our spirituality is both “already” (realized) and also “not yet” (fully realized). In definitive sanctification, the Spirit has already set us apart from sin for holiness as saints. But, as we know all too well, we are not yet fully holy. Final sanctification is not yet realized; the ongoing struggle for holiness persists. So we live in between the already and the not yet of our salvation, and this causes us to experience tensions in the meantime. The chapter later in this volume focusing on spirituality according to Paul will address this more thoroughly, but a brief sketch may prove helpful here. From Romans 6–8, we learn that we are both crucified with Christ and alive in Christ (Rom. 6:1–14); we are both slaves and free (6:15–7:7); we are at war but are victorious in it (7:8–8:4); we are both debtors and heirs (8:12–25); we are both persevering and being preserved (8:26–39).

God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility also display tensions in our spirituality. God develops our spirituality as the fruit of the Spirit, and yet we confess sin, repent, trust, grow, study, pray, give, witness, and live in community. Similarly, we experience the tension of putting off, being renewed, and putting on. As a result, our spiritual journey

⁵⁰ Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, 62.

⁵¹ Calhoun, “Sin and Temptation,” 258.

positively involves pursuing holiness out of love for Christ, yet it also involves negatives—daily turning away from sin out of the same love for Christ. The first of Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses states plainly: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Matt. 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Repentance is an “altering of one’s habits of thoughts, one’s attitudes, outlook, policy, direction, and behavior, just as fully as is needed to get one’s life out of the wrong shape and into the right one. Repentance is in truth a spiritual revolution.”⁵² We are works in progress, still under construction, on the path to spiritual maturity.

Word, Prayer, and Church: Means for Our Spirituality

Paul’s language of putting off and putting on (Ephesians 4; Colossians 3) suggests actions we must take and practices we must embrace to fight against the lure of sin and the pervasive manifestations of sin in our world. Dallas Willard clarifies: “Spiritual formation in Christ is an orderly process. Although God can triumph in disorder, that is not his choice. And instead of focusing upon what God *can* do, we must humble ourselves to accept the ways he *has chosen* to work with us.”⁵³ What are the ways of the orderly process?

The Scriptures do not suggest any shortcuts by which we can grow in sanctification. Instead, we are encouraged repeatedly to give ourselves to the time-honored means of Bible reading and meditation (Ps. 1:2; Matt. 4:4; 17:17), prayer (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6), worship (Eph. 5:18–20), witnessing (Matt. 28:19–20), Christian fellowship (Heb. 10:24–25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal. 5:23; Titus 1:8). Cruise control is a wonderful technology in our automobiles, but there is no such option in the journey of the Christian life. We will not coast into godliness. Writing to Timothy, Paul is upfront about the requirements of spiritual exertion: “Train yourself for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7).

In his *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Donald Whitney appropriately begins his analysis with two chapters on Bible intake, stating: “No spiritual discipline is more important than the intake of God’s Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture.”⁵⁴ Biblical intake

⁵² J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 110.

⁵³ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 10; emphases original.

⁵⁴ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), n.p.

especially includes reading the Bible. Bible intake also includes meditation on God's Word and carefully studying Scripture to learn about God, his ways, our sin, Jesus' person and work, our salvation, the church, and God's grand story of redemption.

Scripture also teaches us the importance of prayer and instructs us in how to pray, even serving as a source for wording our prayers to God. In other words, in Bible intake, we immerse ourselves in God's Word and use it to form our prayers.⁵⁵ The apostle Paul models for us the kind of praying necessary for fighting sin, pursuing holiness, and maintaining a fervency for spiritual flourishing as he states that we must be "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). In order for us to pray in all situations, we must include the various senses in which Scripture portrays prayer. We offer prayers of praise, thanks, confession, intercession, petition, and more. Our praying encompasses all seasons, and, because of its frequency, we should fight against every urge to reduce it to a rote exercise in which we check off the proverbial boxes. Prayer should be seen as a practice and as a pursuit. As sons and daughters of God, we are led by the Spirit, even in our prayers (Rom. 8:14–27). Paul's insistence on prayers for the saints includes the full range of the kinds of prayers offered to the body of Christ in Scripture. Thus, our prayers for the saints could include a rejoicing in God's favor and blessing, petitions for repentance, and strength for the advance of the gospel.

Our Christian discipleship is refined through our dedication to knowing Christ through the spiritual disciplines, but our individual efforts are only part of the means we have in our spiritual trajectory. On a corporate level, we lean on God's ordinary means of grace to keep our feet grounded in the primary ways God works in and through us. Questions 88 and 89 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism ask two critical questions related to the means Christ gives his people:⁵⁶

Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption?

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communiceth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer. . . .

⁵⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁵⁶ Westminster Shorter Catechism, questions 88 and 89.

Q. 89. How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching, of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

God graciously provides for our sanctification. He not only serves as the source of our spirituality; he also gives us the very means by which we grow.

Reproducing Disciples: The Mission of Our Spirituality

Our spirituality is not only for ourselves but especially for others. Any depiction of Christian spirituality devoid of the pursuit of making disciples is not consistent with the teachings of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus clarifies true spirituality, which includes being and making disciples.

Jesus launches his public ministry by proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). From the beginning, Jesus stresses a spirituality linked to God’s kingdom, which refers to God’s rule and reign over us as his people.⁵⁷ The kingdom has come into history in the person of Jesus and will finally and ultimately “come at the end of the age in a mighty irruption into history inaugurating the perfect order of the age to come.”⁵⁸ As the bearer of this kingdom, Jesus demands that we repent, which involves rejecting the present way of the world and embracing God’s rule and its corresponding way of life. As such, repentance is the way *into* the kingdom and the way *of* the kingdom, the way of spirituality. As his disciples, we follow Jesus, “the present-in-history king,”⁵⁹ and we come under him, walk alongside him, believe his teachings, embrace his way of life, and participate in his mission (4:17–19).

Then, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sets forth his vision of the spirituality and values of his new kingdom community. In the Sermon’s beatitudes, Jesus reorients our values and thus spirituality itself. As his people, we are driven not by wealth, power, honor, or comfort but by faith, hope, and love. Our spirituality is linked to our kingdom character. Jesus begins by pronouncing God’s blessings upon his kingdom community

⁵⁷ For more on how spirituality, the church, and mission interrelate, see Anthony L. Chute and Christopher W. Morgan, “Missional Spirituality as Congregational,” in *Spirituality for the Sent: Casting a New Vision for the Missional Church*, ed. Nathan A. Finn and Keith S. Whitefield (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 75–95.

⁵⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 144–49.

⁵⁹ Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation,” in *The Kingdom of God, Theology in Community*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 110.

(Matt. 5:3–12). Jesus expressed these blessings in a pattern, first by pronouncing “blessed” people who are marked by particular characteristics: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Jesus here links God’s blessing, his kingdom community, and true spirituality. As disciples of Jesus, we live out a spirituality marked by dependence on God, longing for repentance, humility, desire for true righteousness, integrity, reconciliation with others, and persecution for faithfully following Christ.

Jesus then relates the blessings themselves: theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they shall be comforted, they shall inherit the earth, they shall be satisfied, they shall receive mercy, they shall see God, they shall be called the sons of God, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The first and last beatitude also end with the same overarching blessing: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3, 10). The six beatitudes in the middle relate future blessings (note the recurring “shall be” in 5:4–9). God blesses us as Jesus’ people, who are a community of the kingdom now (“theirs is the kingdom”) that awaits a fuller, final display of the kingdom (“shall be”). John Stott puts it well: “The blessing promised . . . is the gloriously comprehensive blessing of God’s rule, tasted now and consummated later, including the inheritance of both earth and heaven, comfort, satisfaction and mercy, the vision and sonship of God.”⁶⁰

The rest of the Sermon on the Mount expands on the kingdom character of spirituality. In Matthew 5:17–48, Jesus calls us to holistic holiness as he highlights that true righteousness is Word-saturated, internal, and external (see also Lev. 19:1–18). In Matthew 6:1–18, Jesus calls us to genuine worship as he stresses that God (not others or ourselves) is to be the sole audience of our worship (using the examples of three spiritual disciplines: giving, praying, and fasting) and that living all of life in light of God’s kingdom is the central focus of our prayer. In Matthew 6:19–34, Jesus sets forth kingdom values as he contrasts earthly treasures with kingdom significance. In Matthew 7, Jesus focuses on the centrality of generous love as he overturns judgmentalism and advances the Golden Rule. Along the way, Jesus clarifies what it means to be his disciple. If we are Jesus’ disciples, we possess true righteousness and live out true spirituality, which is marked by our kingdom character, holistic holiness, genuine worship, kingdom values, and generous love.

⁶⁰John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 38.

A community so enthusiastic about the Messiah's arrival and committed to live out such a spirituality might be expected to be self-focused, cloistered, and separated from the rest of society. Jesus, however, interweaves our spirituality with our mission. Indeed, our spirituality fuels our mission. Jesus' call, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (4:19), reveals that part of being Jesus' disciple is following Jesus. And inherent in following Jesus is becoming "fishers of men" and thus participants in Jesus' own mission. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, "discipleship and mission are inseparably linked."⁶¹ As his disciples, we are called and sent, called to follow the way of the kingdom and sent to call others to do the same.

Jesus also stresses the inherently missional nature of his kingdom community as he calls us to be the "salt of the earth" (5:13) and the "light of the world" (5:14). These images build on the Beatitudes, in which Jesus associates God's kingdom not with human strength and honor but with our spiritual poverty, crying, meekness, hunger, mercy, peace, and persecution. Fundamental to these images is our distinctiveness as the holy kingdom community (5:3–12). The world is in decay, and we are the salt. The world is in darkness, and we are the light. Both images not only assume the community's distinctiveness but also clarify the community's mission. As the salt of the earth, Jesus' disciples "purify the world by living holy lives and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom."⁶² Further, "Jesus insisted that the disciples' mission of shining in the world, extending salvation to the ends of the earth by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and living transformed lives, is intrinsic to genuine discipleship."⁶³

Thus Jesus interweaves his community's spirituality with its mission. Not only does our spirituality fuel our mission, but our mission as Jesus' kingdom community also reproduces spirituality. This is suggested in Matthew 4:17–19, as Jesus calls us to follow him and fish for others who then likewise follow Jesus and presumably fish for others too. It is also suggested in Matthew 5:3–16, as we who are salt and light point others to God through our distinctive goodness, which points to God as our Father. Some persecute us as a result of our strong identification with God (5:10–12), but others glorify God and thus also follow Jesus and too are characterized by righteousness.

⁶¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 272–79.

⁶² Charles L. Quarles, *A Theology of Matthew*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 80.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 86; see also 194–205.

What Jesus teaches in Matthew 4:17 and 5:3–16 is spelled out even more directly in Matthew 28:18–20: our mission as his kingdom community is reproductive spirituality. In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus issues the Great Commission, asserting that he is the exalted Son who is Lord over all, both in heaven and on earth, including all nations (28:18; see also Dan. 7:14). The universality of the commission is striking: Jesus has all authority, directs us to make disciples of all nations, instructs us to teach all that he has commanded, and charges us to do so “all the days,” until the end of the age. The particularity of the commission is also striking: Jesus uniquely is Lord, he alone is worthy of worship by all nations, his teachings have binding authority, and his presence is with us as we participate in his mission.⁶⁴

The essence of Jesus’ Great Commission is found in his command to make disciples of all nations. Jesus calls us who are his disciples to make other disciples, who are also expected to follow Jesus, listen to his teaching, and reflect his ways. As his disciples, we live in community, in fellowship with the teacher and with each other as fellow followers of Jesus, the Teacher. Schnabel comments, “The directive to ‘make disciples’ demonstrates the ecclesiological dimension of the mission of the Twelve: missionary work and church must not be separated, since the very goal and purpose of missionary work is the creation of a community of disciples.”⁶⁵ Making disciples of all nations expands the mission beyond that of Israel unto all Gentile peoples.⁶⁶

The central command of making disciples is expanded by three participles: *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*. Matthew apparently uses “go” as an introductory circumstantial participle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb—here “Go and make” (cf. 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7).⁶⁷ The participle establishes the motion that is necessary for the accomplishment of the command. This makes good sense of the context, since we can make other disciples of all nations only if we go to people who do not yet know Jesus. Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations also by “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (28:19). We who follow Christ depict our new allegiance to Jesus through baptism. Through baptism, we publicly identify with Christ as Lord, with one another in Jesus’ kingdom community, and with

⁶⁴ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 353–55.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁶⁶ “Nations” does not refer to a geopolitical nation-state but connotes Gentiles and something akin to peoples, families, clans, and tribes; see Gen. 12:3; Dan. 7:13–14; Matt. 24:14; and Rev. 5:9–10.

⁶⁷ David W. Chapman, “The Great Commission as the Conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel,” *All for Jesus: A Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Covenant Theological Seminary*, ed. Robert A. Peterson and Sean Michael Lucas (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2001), 91.

the entire Trinity. Making disciples of all nations also includes “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (28:20). As Jesus’ disciples, we do not make our own disciples but point people to become followers of Jesus, the teacher. As such, we do not put forward our own teachings but faithfully pass on the teachings of the teacher. Both believing and practicing Jesus’ teachings are required, both by the disciples and by the new disciples.

Thus Jesus declares that our mission as his kingdom community is disciple making, and as such is reproductive spirituality. We are to be focused on the intentional “multiplication of other faithful followers of the King among the nations.”⁶⁸ As we follow Jesus, we fish for others who both follow Jesus and likewise fish for others. As we embody true spirituality in our lives, we are salt and light, which leads others to know and follow God too. We have a mission: to make other disciples of all nations. Thus, in and through the community of Jesus, spirituality and mission interweave, each spiraling into the other, each fueling the other, and each increasingly reproducing missional spirituality.

The Glory of God: The Ultimate End of Our Spirituality

What is the ultimate end of our spirituality? Where is the trajectory of our spirituality headed? The ultimate end of our spirituality is neither our spirituality nor the spirituality of others, as important as both are; the ultimate end of our spirituality is the glory of God.

Ephesians is helpful here. From the outset, Paul establishes that God’s ultimate end is his glory, and he praises God for his comprehensive blessings of salvation. In his praise, Paul highlights the work of the Trinity in salvation (1:3–14) and explicitly incorporates a refrain: “to the praise of his glorious grace” (v. 6), “to the praise of his glory” (vv. 12, 14). Paul’s point is unmistakable: the ultimate end of our salvation is not our salvation, as important as that is. God chose, adopted, redeemed, united, gave an inheritance, and sealed us to the praise of his glory.

Paul continues this emphasis in Ephesians 2. Because of his love and grace, God makes us alive in Christ. What is his ultimate end in saving us? Ephesians 2:7 informs us: “So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in [his] kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” That God’s glory is his ultimate end is also clear in Ephesians 3:

⁶⁸ Jeff Lewis, “God’s Great Commissions for the Nations,” *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Mike Barnett and Robin Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 104.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph. 3:8–10)

Here Paul stresses that his salvation, apostolic calling, and mission to the Gentiles have as their ultimate end the glorious display of God and his wisdom.

The doxology in Ephesians 3:20–21 continues this theme and forcefully declares: “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” The prayer and praise of the church is that God will receive glory for all eternity.

Thus God’s glory is his ultimate end.⁶⁹ But what does this mean? Two aspects stand out in Ephesians. First, God acts unto the praise of his glory, or to the praise of the glory of his grace (1:6, 12, 14). So God’s glory as his ultimate end means that God acts unto the reception of worship and praise of his creation, especially his people. Second, God acts to display himself throughout creation. He displays his love, mercy, grace, kindness, creative work, and wisdom (2:4–10; 3:8–10). God’s glory as his ultimate end also means that God acts to display himself, and as he displays himself he communicates his greatness and fullness. That in and of itself glorifies him. So, according to Ephesians, God’s glory as his ultimate end means that he acts unto the reception of worship and acts to display himself and communicate his greatness.

Remarkably, both relate directly to our identity and purpose as human beings created in the image of God. Sinclair Ferguson explains:

In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form. Restoration to this is effected through the Spirit’s work of sanctification, in which he takes those who have distorted God’s image in the shame of sin, and transforms them into those who bear that image in glory. . . .

⁶⁹ God’s glory is the goal of creation; the exodus; Israel; Jesus’ ministry, life, death, resurrection, and reign; our salvation; the church; the consummation; and all of salvation history. See Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory*, ed. John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 125–36.

The mark we were created to reach, but have missed, was glory. We have sinned and failed to attain that destiny. Against this background, the task of the Spirit may be stated simply: to bring us to glory, to create glory within us, and to glorify us together with Christ. The startling significance of this might be plainer if we expressed it thus: the Spirit is given to glorify us; not just to “add” glory as a crown to what we are, but actually to transform the very constitution of our being so that we become glorious. In the New Testament, this glorification is seen to begin already in the present order, in believers. Through the Spirit they are already being changed from glory to glory, as they gaze on/reflect the face of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:17–18). But the consummation of this glorification awaits the eschaton and the Spirit’s ministry in the resurrection. Here, too, the pattern of his working is: as in Christ, so in believers and, by implication, in the universe. . . .

The image and image-bearers are one in Spirit to the end, so that when Christ appears in glory image-bearers are one with him in that glory (Col. 3:4). We are raised in Christ, with Christ, by Christ, to be like Christ.⁷⁰

Horton adds, “God did not become human so that humans might become God, or even supernatural, but so that humans who had fallen into sin and death could be redeemed, reconciled, justified, renewed, and glorified as the humanity that we were created to become.”⁷¹

In other words, we were created to be worshipers of God and the display people of God, but we all refused to acknowledge God’s glory and instead sought our own glory. Through this we forfeited the glory God intended for us as his image bearers. By his grace and through union with Christ the perfect image, however, God restores us as full image bearers to participate in and reflect the glory we longed for the whole time. Thus we are recipients of glory, are undergoing transformation through glory, and will be sharers of glory. Our salvation, and thus our spirituality, is not merely from sin but is also unto glory. We who exchanged the glory of God for idols, we who rebelled against God’s glory, have been, are being, and will be completely transformed by the very glory we despised and rejected (Rom. 1:18–31; 3:23; 8:28–30; 9:23; 2 Cor. 3:18). And through union with Christ, together we are the church, the new humanity (Eph. 2:11–22; 4:11–16; 4:20–24), the firstfruits of the new creation, bearing God’s image, displaying how life ought to be, and making known the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10–11).

⁷⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 139–40, 249, 251.

⁷¹ Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2007), 302.

Even more, we are a part of something far bigger than ourselves. We are a part of the story of the glorious God who graciously and joyfully communicates his fullness, chiefly through his creation, image bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. As his people we respond by glorifying him, and in this God receives glory. Further, through uniting us to the glorious Christ, the perfect image of God, God transforms us and shares his glory with us. And all of this redounds to his glory, as God in his manifold perfections is exhibited, known, rejoiced in, and prized. No wonder Paul exclaims, “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever” (Rom. 11:36). Our spirituality is from God, through God, and to God. God is the beginning, middle, and end of our spirituality. Thus his glory is the ultimate end of our spirituality.

The Grace of God: Fuel for Our Journey

Beginning with being created in the image of God and culminating in the glory of God, a trajectory of our spiritual journey has emerged:

- the image of God: created for spirituality
- fallen man: the distortion of our spirituality
- Christ’s saving work: the basis of our spirituality
- new life: the beginning of our spirituality
- the triune God: the source of our spirituality
- Christlikeness: the goal of our spirituality
- love: the focus of our spirituality
- the church: the community of our spirituality
- ordinary life: the context of our spirituality
- indwelling sin/temptation: obstacles in our spirituality
- the already and the not yet: tensions in our spirituality
- Word, prayer, and church: means for our spirituality
- reproducing disciples: the mission of our spirituality
- the glory of God: the ultimate end of our spirituality
- the grace of God: fuel for our journey

As we have seen, God is the beginning, middle, and end of our spirituality.

God’s grace begins our spiritual journey (Eph. 2:1–10; Titus 3:4–7). God’s grace will complete our spiritual journey (Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:18–39; 1 Pet. 1:3–5). We will “persevere in holiness because God perseveres in grace.”⁷²

And in the meantime, God’s grace provides the fuel for our spiritual journey. Charles Spurgeon said it well: “Between here and heaven, every

⁷²Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, Read and Reflect with the Classics (repr. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 162.

minute that the Christian lives will be a minute of grace.”⁷³ When we are in need, God’s grace gives us boldness: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). When we are in sin, God’s grace fosters our repentance and promotes our holiness: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11–12). When we need strength to keep on serving God, God’s grace enables us, as Paul testifies: “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor. 15:10). When we are tired and weak, God’s grace fortifies us, as Paul attests: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). When we forget who we are in Christ, God’s grace reminds us, as Geoffrey Thomas explains:

God has joined us to Christ. We are no longer standing under what Adam deserves, and I no longer stand under what I deserve, but God has caused us to stand under what Christ deserves. God’s grace places us under the eloquence of his blood. He places us under all the adequacy of that sacrifice. God places us in the full deserving of our Lord’s obedience and righteousness. He causes us to stand under the total logic of his atonement, so that there is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. Your conscience has no right to condemn you, and death has no right to terrorize you, and hell has no right to stand up before you because there is now no condemnation whatsoever. Why? Because you were and are in Christ Jesus. You stand in his merit, and you stand in his righteous obedience in all its glory, because that is what God did when he gave you to his Son Jesus Christ and joined you to him forever. Your life stands under all the implications of how Christ lived and how he died. You stand in the logic of Calvary and the glory of the shed blood. You stand in the righteous life of Christ the blameless Son of God. God has united us to Jesus Christ his Son.⁷⁴

⁷³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Tenses” (No. 2718), sermon preached May 13, 1880, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons47.xi.html>.

⁷⁴ Geoffrey Thomas, sermon, “But God,” preached May 2, 2004, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://www.alfredplacechurch.org.uk/index.php/sermons/ephesians/24-7-but-god>. I owe this reference to John Mahony, unpublished notes and “Purchased Grace,” Christian Ministries Lectures, California Baptist University, February 23, 2016, <https://calbaptist.edu/school-of-christian-ministries/lecture-series>.



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