



Your Spiritual Formation Plan

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HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

My spiritual formation journey picked up speed when I repented of my sin in a fresh way and sought God when I was just a boy. God got ahold of my heart early and changed my life. Even in my adolescence, God used some of the core disciplines in this book to shape me, the effects of which I still carry with me today. My parents had laid the groundwork, and God used that foundation and a handful of other people to jumpstart my early experiences with God.

It was God himself who formed me.

In the time since my early experiences, as God has continued to form me—and even put up with me—I’ve compiled lessons along the way, and this workbook contains some of the most important ones I’ve learned thus far on my spiritual formation journey.

I wrote this workbook for disciples of Jesus at all points in their walk: from the new Christian to the pastor of a church, from the young disciple to the seasoned disciple-maker. It’s for any follower of Jesus who wants to experience the fullness of God in a fresh way. In Christ we “have been given fullness,” but we are still encouraged to “press on toward the goal to win the prize” for which God has called us “heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Col. 2:10; Phil. 3:14). The exercises in this workbook can help any disciple grow.

Why I Wrote This

The goal of this workbook is to help you take your next steps with God. I share lessons I’ve learned and offer prompts to help you determine your course of action each step of the way. My hope is that, by the grace of God, you can use this resource to make progress on your spiritual formation journey.

The devotional material in these pages was birthed from my personal experiences and from my interactions with students as I've taught spiritual formation in my church. The first time I taught a class on spiritual formation, I created the first iteration of this workbook so everyone could walk away with a customized plan. The people in that class and those in the young adults' group I was leading found value in what I created, so I expanded that first iteration into what you're holding now. I saw how it helped people to put their plan on paper, so I wanted to make it available to even more people and churches. May you benefit from this workbook as others have.

Three Important Influences

As I wrote the devotionals for this workbook and created prompts, three major influences formed my thinking. First, Dallas Willard's books have made a profound impact on my life in general, but one book in particular inspired me to think in terms of crafting a literal plan. In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, he writes about the reality that we are called to obey all of Christ's commands, as Jesus made clear in the Great Commission. Then, Willard pushes the idea further to say that we need *a plan* in order for this happen. His statement about planning for spiritual formation should capture our attention: "It is the rare leader or teacher today who can calmly say, 'Here's how you do it,' and state specific tried and true steps actually accessible to the earnest inquirer." I've found this to be true, even today. This workbook doesn't contain *the way* for planning spiritual formation, but it serves as *a way* to help others start a workable plan toward obedience to all of Jesus' commands.

The second influence that drives the content of this workbook is the idea that spiritual disciplines are God's "means of grace"—ways through which God pours out his grace into our lives. Spiritual formation happens as we practice spiritual disciplines, and these disciplines are key ways we receive blessings from God. The practices I encourage in this book are channels through which God floods us with his overwhelming grace. This grace, poured out through the Holy Spirit, changes our hearts and lives as we participate with God through our actions. We're set free to run hard after God, the benefit of which is "holiness, and the result is eternal life" (Rom. 6:22).

The third influence is something I learned through personal experience: spiritual formation is a journey that requires time, training, and experimentation. This workbook presents a unique opportunity to experiment and play as you make plans for your journey. What drives this work-in-progress mentality is the idea that we grow by experimenting with spiritual disciplines. The idea of

“experimenting” with anything usually connotes bad behavior, but we ought to change that! When we experiment in good ways with pure hearts before the Lord, it’s difficult to go very wrong, especially if we’re humble and experiment in community and in constant communication with God. I emphasize experimentation here because many of the exercises in this workbook assume you’re willing to put yourself out there and try new practices. In the pages that follow, I ask you to put pen to paper, brainstorm, and play with ideas, and for some of you this might feel uncomfortable. But if you can bear some momentary discomfort, you will grow stronger in the end.

Three Companion Resources

HIM Publications recorded and released the class I originally taught that goes with this workbook. It’s now available as a video course called *Spiritual Formation*. So while this workbook can serve as a stand-alone resource, it’s not a complete guide to spiritual formation. I’ve written it with the assumption that you’ll use other resources as well. I recommend you utilize my video course—to hear more of my heart for each part of the plan—and at least one other book.

My *Spiritual Formation* video course provides more substantive teaching on spiritual formation as a whole and on the specific disciplines in this workbook. Learn more and sign up at himpublications.com/spiritual. Dallas Willard’s *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* is the main text I reference in my course, and I highly recommend this book for its depth and insight into how spiritual formation works. Those are my top two recommendations to you because this workbook was created with those in mind. If you watch the spiritual formation video sessions and read *Renovation of the Heart*, you’ll be well suited for making good progress on your spiritual formation journey.

A third resource I recommend for going deeper into the specific disciplines of this workbook is *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard J. Foster. This is considered the gold standard for introducing the spiritual disciplines to modern readers. It covers all the core disciplines included in this book.

At the end of most chapters, I offer other supplemental resources for the subject matter of that chapter. These recommended resources can make up for what is lacking in my short devotionals. The devotional thoughts are intentionally short because the goal of this resource is primarily about taking action. I don’t provide in this workbook the necessary biblical theology, background, or

thorough treatment each discipline deserves, as do the above resources. It builds on those materials by helping you make plans and take specific actions.

Three Sections of This Workbook

What follows will form your spiritual formation plan in three parts. I've included checkboxes throughout the workbook to help you track your progress on the journey. For each chapter, you will take specific steps.

- Part 1, "Your Initial Spiritual Formation Plan," jumpstarts your journey with the most important task of the whole workbook: crafting your Rule of Life. It also guides you to determine your greatest desire and your most pressing challenges right now.
- Part 2, "Your Next Steps in the Disciplines," introduces the disciplines, encourages you to take the 21-Day Challenge, and helps you formulate initial plans for ten core disciplines.
- Part 3, "Your Next Season of Spiritual Formation," helps you build on your plan from the first two parts and apply your foundation toward a long-term approach to formation.

A final suggestion before you jump in: go at your own pace. Allow this workbook to push you, but if push comes to shove, pause and evaluate your pace. I've seen how easily people get overwhelmed as they form their plan, so remember that at any point, you can pause, go backwards, speed up, or do whatever you need to do in order to complete this workbook successfully. And remember:

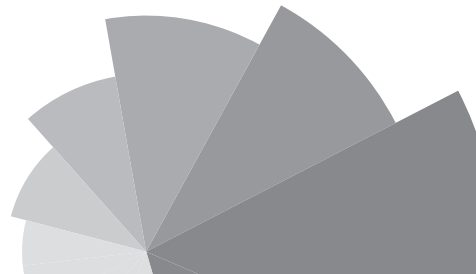
God's grace abounds, and his grace is the air
we breathe as we walk along the Way.

So press on with the confidence that God leads disciples of Jesus in and through his abounding grace.

Part 1

YOUR INITIAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION PLAN

Part 1 helps you form the foundation for your spiritual formation plan. Learn the value of creating a Rule of Life, how it functions in your plan, and how to create yours. Then, identify your single greatest desire in life right now so you can proceed in authenticity. The last chapter in this part helps you identify your greatest barriers to connecting with God right now.



THE 21-DAY CHALLENGE

In this chapter you will:

- Pick your micro-discipline for the challenge.
- Ask a friend to join you.
- Choose an end date.
- Get started!

Now that you have an overview of the disciplines, it's time to jump into action! We'll go through the core disciplines, starting in the next chapter, but we learn best when we combine our knowledge *with action*. Taking action is vital from the beginning to the end of our discipleship journey. We can only learn to walk in step with the Holy Spirit if we're actually moving and taking steps at all. That's why I created the 21-Day Challenge. This challenge gives you a jumpstart on your spiritual formation journey.

The 21-Day Challenge is to pick a single discipline and practice that discipline every day for twenty-one days straight.

Practice a discipline of your choice as best you currently know how. It's not about "getting it right," but about starting small. The purpose is to help you grow in developing spiritual habits. My hope is that you will also gain confidence in what God can do in you as you follow through with your intentions.

Beginning to build your spiritual muscles early in the discipleship process is important because it reminds you that it's about progress not perfection, and learning as you go instead of focusing on "arriving." As disciples of Jesus, we're in this race for the long haul, not just a sprint. So my goal is to help you cultivate lifelong habits, starting with simple ones. If you're already experienced in the disciplines, the 21-Day Challenge is your opportunity to restart a habit, explore a discipline less familiar to you, or expand your current habits in a fresh

way. Using the two lists of key disciplines from the last chapter, select *just one discipline* and focus on it for the next three weeks.

Practice that one discipline, and here's a piece of advice: choose a "micro-form" of that discipline. For example, if you choose the discipline of reading Scripture and you're rusty, then read the Bible for only a small amount of time each day or meditate on a small portion of the Word—whatever is doable for you. If you choose prayer, you might decide to pray the Our Father Prayer (also known as the Lord's Prayer) every day. Perhaps you'd like to fast for one meal a day for twenty-one days or silence your phone for a window of time each day.

Download a printable PDF of the Our Father Prayer by going to himpublications.com/father.

Whatever you choose, follow through with your commitment for the next twenty-one days in a row. Here's the kicker: start today! There's no need to wait another day to take your next step.

While I intentionally chose the number of days for this challenge, nothing special about twenty-one days influenced my decision. It's long enough to stretch a person but not too long to push them too hard. While this exercise may expose a weakness or two you didn't know you had, you should also experience breakthroughs, waves of refreshment, and excitement about moving forward with this and other disciplines. If at any point you want to give up, I encourage you to press on and perhaps modify your commitment, rather than abandoning the challenge altogether.

I hope you also know yourself better by the end of the next three weeks. Self-knowledge, surprisingly enough, is very important in our spiritual journey. When we're aware of both our abilities and our weaknesses, our awareness helps us form workable plans for ourselves that lead to real growth rather than mere wishful thinking. Then, as we grow, what was once difficult becomes easier. Proper self-knowledge helps us reasonably and successfully submit to God's work in our lives.

Another important outcome I hope you gain from this exercise is your growth in integrity. Integrity in the context of spiritual formation means we follow through with our commitments. If we say we're going to do something, let's do it! Living with integrity means we're true to ourselves before God. Jesus described integrity like this: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matt. 5:37). The 21-Day Challenge creates space for cultivating integrity as it offers a practical way to say yes—or no—to yourself before God. So make a small commitment and stick to it as best you can.

Saying no and sticking to that is just as important as saying yes and sticking to it. We can easily overextend ourselves and overcommit, especially at the outset of a new challenge. But as we learn to let our yes be yes and our no be no, we allow space for God to build integrity in us. In this way, we work with God as he forms and substantiates our character. God works in our hearts and through our actions to make us more whole and holy before him.

Here are two tips for success in this challenge. First, while you're obviously free to do more than one discipline, *commit to only one discipline for the 21-Day Challenge*. That way you can make sure to follow through with that one, even if all else fails. Second, and this can make it more fun, ask a friend or a mentor to join you. You will likely pick a different discipline than your companion, but start and end on the same day together. Complete the exercise below, tell your friend what you're doing (even though you don't have it all figured out), and invite them to join you. Then, go ahead—pick up that phone, send that text message, or initiate that conversation—and get started today! This provides some built-in accountability and encouragement so you can make sure to cross the finish line of this challenge.

Supplemental Reading

Caroline Leaf is a Christian and a communication pathologist and audiologist. She combined her understanding of Scripture with how the brain works in her book *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013). Her research encourages readers that their brain can change, and her book features a 21-day “brain detox plan,” which provides additional perspective for the 21-Day Challenge.



Use the space below to plan your 21-Day Challenge.

Which discipline would you like to commit to for the next twenty-one days, starting today? What will it look like for you to follow through with this discipline?

How will you measure success at the end of this challenge? Describe at least one *minimum measurable parameter* of success here.

Whom will you ask to join you? This can be a family member, a friend, or a mentor.

What is the end date for your challenge? Put that date in your calendar or post it somewhere as a reminder.

REFINING YOUR RULE OF LIFE

In this chapter you will:

- Refine your Rule of Life.
- Celebrate your progress!

Before we continue, let me pause and congratulate you: well done! The progress you've made so far is a grace from God. And for the ways you've participated with him and responded to his promptings along the way, good work.

You've taken steps through ten core spiritual disciplines, and now you're ready to refine your Rule of Life. Consider how far you've come and what you've learned along the way: You crafted the first draft of your Rule of Life at the beginning of this workbook. Since then, you've identified your primary desire and major barriers along your journey. You also took the 21-Day Challenge to jumpstart your journey. Then, you formed your initial plan for solitude, silence, rest, reading Scripture, prayer, fasting, service, submission, confession, and listening. Your work to complete these steps will help you refine your Rule of Life.

As I mentioned at the outset, I recommend you do at least two drafts of your Rule of Life. Making changes is not only okay, but good! It means you're making progress in your plans toward becoming who you uniquely want to be in Christ. So redraft your Rule by editing and tweaking it. You can do this as many times as you see fit, until you settle on something with which you're happy. It can be something you keep for years to come, so consider it an investment of your time. While you may make additional edits after this point, go ahead and redraft it now. In the end, you should be able to measure your life with your Rule as a measuring stick.

When you are happy with it, put it somewhere you can easily access. You might even consider posting it somewhere in your home so you frequently see it. I created a Rule of Life for my family and we hung it in our room, for example,

to help us remember who we want to be as a family. Whatever you decide to do with your personal Rule, let it serve as a monument along the road of your spiritual formation journey.

Use the last pages of this chapter to refine your Rule of Life. But before you continue, I want to give you a vision for what's next in Part 3. My hope is that your completion of Part 1 and Part 2 has provided a launching pad for your progress, but your journey is not over yet! In Part 3 of this workbook, you will consider how to continue making plans for spiritual progress as you move beyond this initial plan.

Invite a Friend to Go Deeper Spiritual Formation Video Course

Now that you've made important strides on your journey, consider inviting someone to walk with you as you continue. We've talked about listening to others for counsel and guidance, but don't forget that you may be that person who gives guidance to someone else!

A great way to disciple others in the disciplines is to invite them to practice the disciplines *with you*. As I mentioned at the beginning, we learn best when we marry knowledge and action. So consider inviting someone to join you in your journey—even now. You're a work in progress, but so is everyone else! And perhaps you're further along the journey than they are. One way you can invite someone to join you is by using this workbook and the class sessions that accompany this workbook in my on-demand *Spiritual Formation* video course, which you can access at himpublications.com/spiritual.

REFINE YOUR RULE OF LIFE

SPIRIT: The heart and will that form the character of my life.

MIND: The thoughts and feelings of my life.

BODY: My body, God's temple.

SOCIAL: The people in my life.

APPENDIX B

How to Do a Book Study

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one . . .
who correctly handles the word of truth.*

— 2 Timothy 2:15

This appendix outlines two types of book studies: a simple and detailed version. If possible, do your book study in community with at least one other person, and if you have access to a trained Bible teacher, process your findings and conclusions with them.

OPTION 1: SIMPLE BOOK STUDY

You can conduct a simple book study in three steps: 1) read the book once to get the big picture, 2) read the book again and write down themes from the book, then 3) read the book a third time to decide the main theme.

OPTION 2: DETAILED BOOK STUDY

The following five steps outline a detailed way to conduct a book study:

1. Prepare for Reading
2. Identify the Theme
3. Make Structural Divisions
4. Conduct a Word Study
5. Exegete and Apply

Step 1. Prepare for Reading

Your preparation will help you make good use of your time as you proceed.

- Prayerfully choose a book of the Bible you want to study.
- Get a copy of the book you can write on. If possible, print out a copy of the book. Consider obtaining a “raw” version of it, with no section titles, chapters, or verses by using biblegateway.com or a comparable source.
- Select a notebook or a journal where you can keep a running tab of your observations and questions as you do this book study.

Step 2. Identify the Theme

It's important to identify the primary theme of the book you're studying because this helps you understand from a high level what's happening in the details.

- Read through the entire raw version of your chosen book in one sitting.
 - As you read, keep a running tab of your questions and observations.
 - List potential book themes as you read. While you are reading, ask yourself and the Holy Spirit, *What are some of the main emphases in this piece of literature?*
- You may want to read the book multiple times until you can identify potential themes.
- Identify what you think is the main theme of the book. You may need to read it again to identify from the themes you listed what is the primary theme—the one that stretches the entire document.

Step 3. Make Structural Divisions

Dividing your book into parts helps you see the flow and progression of the book. Once you make the divisions, focus on just one subsection of your book. You will use this subsection for conducting a word study in Step 4.