



# Living Soul-Full Facilitator's Guide

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**(With gratitude to Cat C. for her wise input.)**

# Living Soul-Full Facilitator’s Guide

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## Introduction

### *Living Soul-Full*



The following **assigned reading** and resources are invaluable for every leader, especially those who are new to *Living Soul-Full* or to facilitating group spiritual direction:

- 1. Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*** by Alice Fryling (2008)
- 2. Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*** by Rose Mary Dougherty (1995)

Thank you for your willingness to guide others through these twenty-six chapters of *Living Soul-Full*. With an open heart, teachable spirit, and desire for deeper intimacy with God, you can facilitate this experience as a full participant, even if you have not encountered this material before.

Facilitators, **please carefully read this introductory material**, even if you have led before. This information will help you be proactive, anticipating challenges before they arise, and assist you in building from the very beginning a **firm foundation** for your group to thrive.

May this journey nourish your own soul in ways you cannot anticipate at the outset. May you trust that the Holy Spirit, the **True Facilitator**, will be your constant companion, counselor, and encourager, even when things do not unfold as you imagined. This work asks for courage and humility. It is not an adventure for the faint-hearted.

Those of us who have facilitated this course are continually reminded that it is **not our role to provide a “successful” experience for every participant**. Each person brings their own gifts and their own burdens into the circle. This curriculum is simply a tool for creating a safe and spacious environment where the Spirit can breathe new life and where Jesus can meet and hold every soul.

We often joke that “Soul Care” looks a lot like the familiar line from Field of Dreams: “*If you build it, he will come.*”

This guide offers key instructions and suggestions for each group meeting. Move through the chapters sequentially, **trusting the Spirit** to guide both the pace and the depth of your conversations, while recognizing that participants come with varied spiritual backgrounds and levels of familiarity with the material.

Allow sufficient time for discussion and shared experiences, understanding that it may not always be possible to cover all the material in one meeting, especially in groups where participants are **eager to share**.

If you sense that it is time to move on to the next section, **trust the Spirit to help you gently redirect the group**. Some participants join small groups because they carry a deep, God-given desire to be seen, heard, and affirmed. You can honor this while continuing to emphasize that *Living Soul-Full* is an experience rooted more in listening than in speaking and in seeking divine consolation rather than human reassurance.

There will be weeks, as well, where **you may finish the material with ample time to spare**, or perhaps you have a group that is more reluctant to share during discussions. This extra time can be used for reviewing previous concepts that weren't fully explored, engaging in an experience together of Lectio Divina, or guided prayer/meditation.

Over time, many facilitators find it helpful to **build a personal “toolbox”** for these occasions when you finish the lesson early. This may include additional questions, practices, or resources that invite deeper reflection. A “Facilitator's Toolbox” page is included at the end of this guide for collecting these ideas, including a “bonus” idea for starters. 😊

Try not to fret if your group is quieter than you'd hoped, and trust that each participant will receive what God intends. Continue, as facilitator, to model vulnerability and honesty, offering gentle and nonjudgmental encouragement. **Release expectation and hold expectancy** that the Spirit is showing up in ways that may not always be evident.

## Basic Guidelines for Facilitating

1. It is recommended that you print these pages two-sided, punch holes in them, and place in a binder for ease of use. **This guide is formatted so that each new chapter begins on an odd-numbered page, making it possible to remove individual lesson guides as needed for ease of facilitating.**

2. An *asterisk* beside a section title in the **participant's book** indicates **additional instructions** found in this guide. If no asterisk appears, follow the material as written. With practice, navigating between this guide and the *Living Soul-Full* workbook will become easier.
3. Each week's suggested **Opening and Closing passages** and experiences are in this guide. The participant's guide may or may not include these passages in full. At times, only the reference is provided so participants may locate material that has resonated with them personally.
4. **Reading aloud from the lesson:** Since participants will have already read the chapter, it is often sufficient to briefly summarize the material and allow discussion to deepen the reflection. Given the breadth of content, reading selected portions aloud can support retention and shared processing. As facilitator, you will discern which parts of the lesson are most beneficial to read aloud. Biblical passages should generally be read aloud.

Keep in mind that some participants may not feel comfortable reading aloud. To help maintain emotional trust and safety, take time to check in with the group about their comfort level with reading aloud during meetings. Let them know that anyone is welcome to opt out of this for the duration of the study.

5. The books *Sacred Companions* (David Benner), *The Way of the Heart* (Henri Nouwen), *Abba's Child* (Brennan Manning), and *The Human Condition* (Fr. Thomas Keating) are **assigned and recommended to be purchased** separately. These books beautifully support and enhance the curriculum but may also be omitted at the leader's discretion if time and resources are limited.

Leaders are encouraged to read these materials in advance to discern their value for the group. These titles are also widely **available used at reduced cost**.

6. As leader, **be open to individual conversations** if one or two are dominating the group discussions or giving advice too frequently. Each group will naturally have those who enjoy speaking more than others, but part of establishing trust is to ensure that each person is heard. You may find that those who are hesitant to speak up have powerful insights to benefit the group when given the space and invitation to speak.

(Framing these conversations as “check-ins” does not single anyone out, as though you are correcting them. I have often found that the “over” and “under”-sharers know who they are and will bring it up themselves if given a safe opportunity. By saying something like, “*I’m just checking in to see how you are feeling about the group and to see how I can better support your experience,*” you open the door for meaningful dialogue and genuine connection. Let grace and non-judgment always lead the way.)

7. **As stated above, some lessons may take more than one week to complete** if discussion is rich or clarification is needed. If the lesson feels unfinished at the end of your meeting time, continue it the following week or send a mid-week email emphasizing points that may not have been adequately covered. When determining your start and finish dates, you may want to build in an extra week or two for this purpose.
8. Encourage participants to **note comments, questions, and reactions** from the reading—both agreements and disagreements—to bring to each week’s discussion. The experience encourages critical thinking and is as much, if not more, about questions than answers.
9. Some chapters include **additional suggested resources** such as books, music, or poetry that align with the lesson themes. These are offered for personal enrichment and are not required assignments.
10. Allow time for participants to share written responses to reflection questions. Not every participant needs to answer each question aloud. If the same few voices tend to respond first, gently invite others into the conversation.
11. As the weeks progress, you will notice **fewer instructions** provided. This is intentional. As your group settles into its own rhythm, trust the relational wisdom and discernment that has developed within the community.
12. **AND trust in your own discernment** as leader to “break the rules” when it seems good and necessary.



**\* Throughout this Facilitator's Guide, any material intended to be read aloud by the facilitator is *italicized*.**

## I. Chapter One, Meeting One

*Living Soul-Full* book page 1

### The Calling: Hearing and Responding to God's Invitation



**As facilitator, you decide which parts of the lesson are most beneficial to read aloud.** Allow time for participants to discuss their responses to the reflection questions and to name any additional questions or concerns that arise.

**\*Opening:** The meeting begins with a reading (or summarization) of the introductory paragraphs in Chapter One and discussion questions. **Allow time to hear everyone's answer to the three reflective questions about their choice to participate in *Living Soul-Full*, as well as questions/concerns/expectations from the Introduction and Getting Started sections.**

Please read aloud and ask for responses to the following passage from page one below. From the very beginning, it is important to normalize participants' varied experiences of the material and to establish that questions and critical thinking are welcome.

*No one will agree with everything presented here, but we desire to make a safe place to bring questions and doubts, which should be welcomed as we learn to think more critically. p. 1*

**\*Interior Life:** Read aloud and discuss each of the quotes in this section. Read aloud, "**What is Living Soul-Full?**" and reflect on the group's purpose.

**\*A New Rhythm:** Read this section aloud, then invite discussion of the Julian of Norwich quote.

**\*Objectives:** Read aloud and discuss the objectives for this course, encouraging feedback.

**\*Commitment/Group Covenant:** Read/summarize/discuss the ideas of commitment and the group covenant. Read aloud and discuss this covenant found in Appendix A. Groups may suggest changes that reflect their shared values and needs. Remind participants that they will have time to prayerfully consider this commitment before signing the covenant in Week Four.

**\*Closing:** Discuss next week's assignments, including securing a copy of the book *Sacred Companions*, and close your meeting by reading "I Tremble On the Edge of a Maybe" by Ted Loder below:

*O God of beginnings,  
as your Spirit moved  
over the face of the deep  
on the first day of creation,  
move with me now  
in my time of beginnings,  
when the air is rain-washed,  
the bloom is on the bush,  
and the world seems fresh  
and full of possibilities,  
and I feel ready and full.  
I tremble on the edge of a maybe,  
a first time,  
a new thing,  
a tentative start,  
and the wonder of it lays its finger on my lips.*

*In silence, Lord,  
I share now my eagerness  
and my uneasiness  
about this something different  
I would be or do:  
and I listen for your leading  
to help me separate the light  
from the darkness  
in the change I seek to shape  
and which is shaping me.  
--Ted Loder from *Guerillas of Grace**

**Resource for Meeting Two or Three:** Brenè Brown's original 2010 Ted Talk, "The Power of Vulnerability," available on YouTube.

**Please preview this 20 minute video prior to leading week two.** Many leaders have found this well-known talk helpful in naming the role of vulnerability in wholehearted living. It has been a favorite of former participants and can be especially beneficial prior to reading journal entries aloud in Week Three, as it helps normalize vulnerability as a necessary part of formation.

Viewing this video is recommended but optional. You may choose to watch it together during Lessons Two or Three or invite participants to view it individually and discuss afterward.

Encourage note-taking to support later conversation.

Note: This video includes one brief instance of profanity.

Please make time in either **Lessons 2 or 3** to process the information in the video:

1. Discuss the quote, “Vulnerability is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears it is also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love.”
2. Discuss responses to the video. What was most surprising to you? What made you feel uncomfortable? What was encouraging?



## II. Chapter Two, Meeting Two

### *Living Soul-Full* book page 7

### Vulnerability and Spiritual Friendship



**Notes on Opening:** Establish a consistent opening rhythm each week by lighting an unscented candle as a reminder of the Holy Spirit's presence, followed by a time of silence. Some participants may be sensitive to strong scents, so unscented candles are recommended. Flameless battery candles also work well.

As facilitator, you will open and close this time of silence, which may last anywhere from two to ten minutes. Begin with shorter periods of silence and gradually extend the time as the group's comfort with silence grows.

At times, it may be **helpful** before lighting the candle to allow participants to briefly name any pressing concerns on their hearts or minds. This can help the group enter the lesson with fewer distractions. Use discernment when offering this space, as it will shorten lesson time and some sessions include more material than others. The goal is always to enter silence as soon as possible once everyone has arrived.

After lighting the candle, you may say, "*Come, Holy Spirit,*" to center the group and remind them of what the flame represents before reading the opening meditation.

As facilitator, close out this opening time of silence with a simple "*Amen,*" a re-reading of the opening quote/scripture, or brief blessing on your time together.

**\*Embracing Silence:** Read this section aloud.

**Opening:** Light a candle and read the C.S. Lewis quote before inviting the group into a brief time of silence. Normalize any discomfort that may arise during this practice.

*We live, in fact, in a world starved for solitude, silence, and private: and therefore starved for meditation and true friendship.*" ~ CS Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

**\*Authentic Connection Heals:** Read or summarize the text, reading selected quotes aloud. Discuss the material and the questions posed in this section.

**\*Our Wild and Deep Souls:** Read the quote, scripture passage Psalm 42:6-7, and invite discussion of the group's responses to the questions in the text.

**\*Spiritual Practice: Journaling:** Read aloud or summarize the overview of journaling as a spiritual practice. Allow time to discuss responses to the questions in this section.

**\*Discussion of Last Week's Reading Assignments:** Discuss the two articles: "The Quiet Miracles of Group Spiritual Direction" and "The Gift of Presence; The Perils of Advice." (Suggestion: Always have highlighted passages from assigned books and articles ready to reflect upon if others are hesitant to speak.)

**\*Discuss insights from Introduction and Chapter One of Sacred Companions.** If time allows, invite group reflection. If not, return to this discussion after next week's opening. (Frequently remind participants to highlight things in the reading that are meaningful. It is affirming to see when two people mark the same sentences!)

**Optional:** If participants are hesitant during discussion, you may invite responses to the following quotes from assigned reading of *Sacred Companions*.

"If you are making significant progress on the transformational journey of Christian spirituality, you have one or more friendships that support that journey. If you do not, you are not. It's that simple." (Introduction)

"The goal of the Christian spiritual journey is not to become less human and more divine; it is to become more fully human. Salvation is not to rescue us from our humanity; it is to redeem our humanity." (Chapter One)

"Some spiritual friends offer us help in knowing ourselves, while others offer help in knowing God. The best offer us both." (Chapter One)

**Closing:** Review next week's assignment, then read aloud the *Prayer of Trust* by Thomas Merton found at the close of Chapter Two.

**Reminder:** Anything *italicized* in this guide is meant to be read aloud by the Facilitator.

**III. Chapter Three, Meeting Three**  
*Living Soul-Full* book page 15  
**Listening Together/Journal Reading**



**Opening:** Light the candle and invite everyone into a time of silence after reading the opening prayer below. Bring this time to a close when ready by saying “Amen.”

*God, within this silence help us to release our ever-present needs for control, approval, and security. Open the eyes of our hearts that we may see and hear you. Help us touch into the silence within each of us: a stillness that we that long for yet also might be fearful of what it may contain. May this silence bring us back to you and to ourselves.*

**\*Ways to Listen:** Read **most or all** of this section aloud to establish guidelines for the gift of **listening to understand**.

**\*Discuss insights from Chapters Two and Three of *Sacred Companions*.**

**Optional:** If participants are hesitant during discussion, you may invite responses to the following quotes from assigned reading of *Sacred Companions*. These discussions are also good ways to hold others accountable for assigned outside readings.

“Soul hospitality is also a gift of safety. Think of feeling safe enough with another person that without weighing words or measuring thoughts you are able to pour yourself out, trusting that the other person will keep what is worth keeping and, with a breath of kindness, blow the rest away.” (Chapter Two)

“This is also why what I do or say is ultimately not all that important. The most important thing I can do is help the other person be in contact with the gracious presence of Christ.” (Chapter Two)

“Soul friends help us see things we cannot see on our own. There are things about ourselves that we would never recognize without them. The true soul friend will not accept our self-deceptions but will gently and firmly confront us with our soul blindness. Soul friends want each other to settle for nothing short of becoming the whole and holy person they are called to be.” (Chapter Three)

**\*Guidelines For the Journaling Process:** Since this is the group's first experience of reading their journaling assignments to one another, **read most or all** of this section aloud to establish the guidelines for holy listening and responding.

**Remember:** Participants are not encouraged at this point to respond to others' journals until they have more of a sense of group spiritual direction process. Others will most likely need to unwire ways of responding that are unhelpful in this setting, and it will take time. Lesson 12 is where we spend a good bit of time on how to ask a "Beautiful Question" after someone reads. Encourage your group to lean into the discomfort of not commenting after someone shares, and let the Spirit provide affirmation/consolation within the silence.

Leaders, along with the candle, always have *a box of tissues to leave on a table* within reach of group members. That way, if someone needs one, they can get it themselves rather than be distracted by someone else handing them one.

**\*Post-Journaling Regret Syndrome:** Read/summarize and discuss this section to **normalize emotions** that may surface after reading journal entries. Let the group know that if they experience this "syndrome," it is **validation** that they were vulnerable.

**\*Journal Readings:** Give enough time for the group to share their journals aloud, pausing for a few seconds of silence between each person. **It is suggested that you, as leader, read your journal first and model vulnerability as a way to encourage others.**

If you feel led, respond as appropriate, utilizing the guidelines from **Appendix E** and information in the books by **Frying** and **Doughtery**. Be mindful of the apprehension some group members may be feeling with this first experience.

Some leaders have the list of **open/suggested questions from Appendix E in front of them** while facilitating journaling meetings, especially if this is a new leading experience. (Facilitators have anxiety, too, about responding appropriately!) Do what feels most comfortable for you.)

**\*Author's note for leaders:** In a group I once participated in, the leader most often said, "*Thank you for sharing,*" after every person spoke. It honestly began to feel irritating and rote. Just be aware if you have some programmed responses and bring that awareness into your comments and your silences.

**Closing:** Close this time together with an **experience of unity** that anchors your group and provides comfort in its familiarity. Perhaps recite the **Lord's Prayer** together and be aware of the beauty of the words of Jesus that have united Christians throughout the centuries. Follow with a summary of the assignment for the week.

## IV. Chapter Four, Meeting Four

*Living Soul-Full* book page 19

### Longing and Desire



Reminder: One week may not be enough time to fully discuss and process the information in each chapter. Trust in your discernment as facilitator if the lesson needs to be continued next week.

**Opening:** Light the candle and invite everyone to reflect on the following verses about hunger and thirst during the time of silence. Close this time by rereading any/all of these again.

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Isaiah 55:1-2*

*Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13-14*

*“Blessed are those who hunger, for they will be satisfied.” Luke 6:21*

**Before beginning the lesson,** check in with the group and process, if needed, last week's first journaling experience, especially if it seems regret/embarrassment are present. Invite anyone who did not read their journal to do so now.

**At this point, some participants may have encountered material in *Living Soul-Full* or in outside assignments that they may struggle or disagree with.** This is a good time to revisit the section on Chapter One, page 1, beginning with “*No one will agree with everything presented here..*” and the two following paragraphs on the top of page 2.

It is important that we, as facilitators, continue to build a safe space to bring questions/conflicts and to normalize this as a healthy part of the Living Soul-Full experience. As stated in the introduction, this Christian experience is more about questions vs. the answers we think we already know.

Within our church community, we do not need to feel threatened or combative when other Christians have a different perspective than we do. (This issue is present in every church, as the New Testament letters of Paul can attest to. Imagine Jews and Gentiles worshipping together!)

We want to encourage participants to sift through these lessons with a teachable spirit, while honoring and welcoming critical thinking. Learning to hear the Spirit's voice of Truth is a lifelong work and deeply personal experience. When what you hear seems not to align with what others are hearing, curiosity rather than defensiveness is the best response.

Some groups need to revisit this often to normalize that not everyone will agree. As facilitator, continue to give participants permission to verbalize anything that doesn't feel quite right, affirming that learning to hold others in love is a vital part of the *Living Soul-Full* experience. We are all learning to work out our "own salvation with tear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12)

**\*Longings:** Discuss the questions in this section regarding longing.

**\*The Heart of Longing:** Summarize and discuss this section.

**\*The Source of Longing:** Read aloud the C.S. Lewis quote and reflect on this section.

**\*Naming Our Desires:** Allow time for the group to reflect on the questions and scripture passages. **Encourage sharing** of answers within the group.

**\*Covenant:** Read and/or summarize then discuss this section, reading sourced quotes aloud. Take a few moments now to **reflect on** the group covenant. **If there are agreed-upon changes, make note of them.** Read the final draft aloud and have everyone sign one copy that the leader will keep. This covenant will help align hearts and spirits for this collective, yet also deeply personal, experience.

Feel free to craft this experience in a way that is meaningful to your group. For example, one group gave each member a stone to signify their commitment to the group covenant; each person wrote a word from Romans 12:1-2 on their stone. (Other facilitators have let participants choose their own words to write.) As each member signed the covenant, they placed their stones in a pile on the table to make an altar. This was a meaningful visual for the entire group. They continued to use these stones around the candle each week as a concrete reminder of the group's purpose.



It is also just fine to simply pass and sign the covenant without fanfare. This is purposeful and significant in and of itself.

**\*Spiritual Practice: Lectio Divina:** Read aloud the introduction to this section and explain that each reading (or movement) is guided by a **focus statement** to help in engaging deeply with God's Word.

**Reminder:** Throughout this Facilitator's Guide, anything that is to be read aloud by the leader will be *italicized*.

#### **Four Readings and Four Moves: Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest**

**(Read) First Reading:** *As I read this passage, listen to the Holy Spirit minister God's Word to you from Psalm 63:1-5, a hymn of David when he was in the desert of Judah.*

*Listen for a word or phrase that touches your heart and hold it.*

*You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.  
<sup>2</sup>I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.  
<sup>3</sup>Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.  
<sup>4</sup>I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.  
<sup>5</sup>I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

Psalm 63:1-5

**Pause briefly before the second reading.**

**(Reflect) Second Reading:** *As I read again, pay attention to any visceral (gut) reaction or emotions that rise up. Listen for God speaking into your life, perhaps regarding a longing or struggle. (Read the text again and pause briefly.)*

**(Respond) Third Reading:** *As I read God's word, receive what Christ has for you today. Listen for an invitation from the Holy Spirit and response from your spirit. (Read the text again.)*

**(Rest) Fourth and Final Reading:** *As you listen to this passage for the last time, release your thoughts and simply rest in it. (Read again.)*

**Closing:** Allow for a brief time of discussion after this first experience of *Lectio Divina* and **gratefully conclude** your time together with the anticipation of gathering again. Summarize and remind the group of this week's assignment.

## V. Chapter Five, Meeting Five

*Living Soul-Full* book page 25

### Silence and Solitude



\*Beginning with this lesson, each section in the participant's book will **not** be marked with an asterisk unless there is a need for greater elaboration or a guided experience that accompanies the starred section.

In each subheading **without** an asterisk, trust your own developing intuition as a facilitator on how to engage with each section, keeping in mind time constraints. Scripture and source quotations should generally be read aloud, as well as parts of the chapter that you want to emphasize for greater retention.

Some members will read carefully and take notes, and others will skim the material and perhaps miss important points. Allow time to summarize each section and discuss the written questions, giving space for participants' additional reflections and questions.

Trust that the Holy Spirit, who is the true Facilitator, will guide you to lead in a way to meet the individual and collective needs of the group. Together, you are the perfect team. You are encouraged to pray for this guidance each week before gathering with your group in order to discern with God in each moment how best to lead, as you never know what will come up. You are in unscripted territory, but the Spirit will not leave you stranded!

(Some of the meetings that I, as a facilitator, deemed "disastrous" turned out to be beneficial learning experiences for others and were clearly more about my own ego's need to be "successful!")

**Opening:** Light the candle and read through the following guided meditation, pausing where necessary to allow for practice. When finished, follow with a moment of silence, then ask the reflection questions.

*One of the first things we forget when we become rushed and hurried is to breathe with intention. Each breath we take is a sacred gift from God and anchors us to the present moment.*

*Take a few deep, slow breaths to clear away the stress of the day and any anxieties clinging to your mind. Be aware of how you are holding this tension in your*

*physical body and breathe to help release this tension. (Allow some time for this experience.)*

*With each inhale, be conscious of a space opening up within you for more of the Holy Spirit to dwell. Open up your desire for Christ's divine image within you to be realized and awakened. Let your thinking mind rest for a bit. If a distracting thought or image appears, acknowledge it briefly and then let it go.*

*Continue to focus on your heart opening as you breathe, while your own ego diminishes, and your inner chatter gradually quiets. Allow your spirit to connect as best as you are able with the presence of the Holy Spirit that is here now, within you and moving among us.*

**Conclude this time as appropriate and take a few moments to discuss and reflect on this experience with guided meditation, using the following questions.**

*What did you notice in your mind and body as you listened to the meditation?*

*Were the suggested actions helpful or distracting?*

*How did the amount of time allotted feel for you? (Too long, not long enough, etc...)*

## **Connecting to Spiritual Practices**

### **Silence and Solitude**

### **Fear of the Void**

### **Solitude and Ministry**

### **Solitude vs. Loneliness.**

### **Making Time for Silence and Solitude**

### **Solitude as Contemplation**

**\*Discuss impressions from *The Way of the Heart*, chapters on "Silence and Solitude."** (Suggested quotes to reflect upon are below, if necessary, but allow others to bring up their own highlighted passages first.)

**Optional:** "Without solitude, it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life."

"Through solitude, life becomes ministry. In such a ministry there is hardly any difference left between doing and being...we can do nothing other than minister because our whole being witnesses to the light that has come into the darkness."

“Would not many, if not most of the words we use be better left unspoken? We speak about the events of the world, but how often do we really change them for the better?... Sometimes it seems that our many words are more an expression of our doubt than of our faith. It is as if we are not sure that God's Spirit can touch the hearts of people; we have to help him out and, with many words, convince others of his power.”

“Words can only create communion and thus new life when they embody the silence from which they emerge. As soon as we begin to take hold of each other by our words, and use words to defend ourselves, or offend others, the word no longer speaks of silence. But when the word calls forth the healing and restoring stillness of its own silence, few words are needed: much can be said without much being spoken.”

## Two Warnings

**Closing:** Discuss the assignment for Meeting Six, then slowly read aloud Psalm 46:10 (below), pausing between lines:

*Be still and know that I am God.*

*Be still and know that I am.*

*Be still and know that I.*

*Be still and know that.*

*Be still and know.*

*Be still.*

*Be.*



**VI. Chapter Six, Meeting Six**  
*Living Soul-Full* book page 33  
**Breath Prayer/Journal Reading**



**Opening:** Light the candle and invite everyone into a time of silence after reading this selection by Walter Bruggemann from his book *Prayers for a Privileged People*. Close as needed.

*We begin the new week toward you, from whom no secret can be hid.  
 We have had a night, a weekend, and a lifetime of secrets.  
 We have stored the usual list of secrets, of acres of guilt unforgiven, of desires too rich to  
 utter.  
 Beyond that, we have a secret list of hurts, from ancient days with parents and siblings,  
 from assorted bullies at play, school, and in adult life; some of us overly sensitive,  
 all of us grown protective and capable of self-pity.  
 Beyond that, we have a secret list of hopes, some selfish and some noble,  
 hopes of new freedom and new reconciliation, of new security and new recognition,  
 of doing well and being well. We have so much to keep hidden.  
 And you know –you know because you made us and have watched us from the beginning; you  
 know because you see us in our waking and our sleeping;  
 you know because you love us right through, beyond all our covert capacity.  
 And we yearn to be known – fully, without reserve by you;  
 So we ask on this day, courage to match your love, honesty to match your generosity,  
 self-awareness to speak into our awareness of us.  
 That by the time the sun sets, we will have rent the curtain of our lives, and let you into the  
 center of it all, there to abide in holy forgiveness.  
 We pray through your spirit of all truth that our truth opened to your mercy may make us free.  
 Amen*

**Establishing Trust for the Speaker**

**\*Journal Readings:** Move on to journal readings, allowing a brief pause between each person. Feel free as the facilitator to ask **open questions** (Appendix E) or share images/impressions in response to what is shared. For now, you, the leader will primarily respond if appropriate, but others will be encouraged to interact more with the reader in the coming weeks while still remembering that silence is often the **most loving response**. Let your group know that **Lesson 12** teaches in-depth about the most helpful responses during group spiritual direction while also freeing participants to respond if they feel led.

**Breath Prayer**

**\*Allow time to discuss the chapter on “Prayer” from The Way of the Heart.**

**Optional:** “The crisis of our prayer life is that our mind may be filled with ideas of God while our heart remains far from him. Real prayer comes from the heart... Real prayer penetrates to the marrow of our soul and leaves nothing untouched.”

“The quiet repetition of a single word can help us to descend with the mind into the heart...a word or sentence repeated frequently can help us to concentrate, or move to the center, to create an inner stillness and thus to listen to the voice of God...Moreover, we can take this prayer with us into a very busy day...Even while we are talking, studying, gardening, or building, the prayer can continue in our heart and keep us aware of God’s ever-present guidance.”

**\*Practice:** Repeat the classic Jesus prayer aloud three times, then give members a few minutes to continue in breath prayer silently on their own.

**In Breath***Jesus**Have mercy on me***Out Breath***Son of God**a sinner*

**Afterwards,** discuss these questions with the group:

*What did you notice in yourself as you settled into breath prayer?*

*How did you sense God's presence in the practice of breath prayer?*

**Closing:** Discuss next week’s assignments then close by reading Genesis 2:7 and the following meditation.

*Then the Lord God formed a man<sup>l</sup> from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7 NIV)*

*Could I live without You?*

*No more than I can exist without oxygen for my lungs.*

*You sustain my pulse of life both internally and externally.*

*Each breath of Your love rejuvenates my spirit.*

*You sustain my daily rhythm of being a loving presence*

*In all that I am and do.*

Joyce Rupp, *Fragments of Your Ancient Name*

## VII. Chapter Seven, Meeting Seven

*Living Soul-Full* book page 41

### Self-Awareness



**Opening:** Light the candle and lead group members in the following guided meditation:

*"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"* (Psalms 150:6 NIV)

*Be conscious now of the solid, physical body that you inhabit. This body is what anchors you to the present moment and is the vehicle that Christ will use to touch and love the world. Spend a few moments in pure gratitude for your living body, concentrating on breath, posture, as well as any stress you may be holding within. Breathe in gratitude and exhale a grateful spirit back into the world using any breath prayer that is helpful. Gratitude is a powerful healing force, so spend a few moments in gratitude for your body in the presence in God.*

#### **A prayer to close out the silence:**

*"Help me, Creator God, to become more aware of your life in me,  
your breath in me, a gift from creation itself.*

*May I be open to you through my inhaling of all that you have to give me,  
and through my exhaling of all that I need to let go of within, that might be  
resistant to your Spirit.*

*Thank you for your gift of life, manifested unceasingly through my breath."*

— Ann Z. Kulp

#### **Self-Examination as a Spiritual Practice**

**\*The Johari Window:** There is a lot of information included in this section and its sub sections. How much is read aloud is always at your discretion as the leader, but it is encouraged to discuss each of the four boxes in detail and reflect on the quotes, scripture, and questions within each.

#### **\*The Blind Spot** (Read aloud):

*"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:2-5 NIV)*

**Closing:** Review assignments for next week and highlight the feedback practice.

**Read Aloud:** *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." (Proverbs 25:11 NKJV).*



## VIII. Chapter Eight, Meeting Eight

*Living Soul-Full* book page 49

### Shame and Grace



**\*Note:** This is a long, but foundational lesson in the book. Do not feel the need to cram everything into one session, especially if the discussion is rich and meaningful.

**Opening:** Light the candle, read and allow time in silence for inner reflection on God's grace after reading Ephesians 2:6-9:

*<sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Bring this time to a **close**.

### Discussion

**\*The Story of the Fall: The Beginning of Brokenness and Formation of the False Self:** Read aloud Genesis 3:1-13 (NIV):

*<sup>3</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*

*<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”*

*<sup>4</sup> “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

*<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were*

*opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

<sup>8</sup> *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

<sup>10</sup> *He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

<sup>11</sup> *And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

<sup>12</sup> *The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

<sup>13</sup> *Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"  
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

### **Discuss the questions presented in this section.**

**\*The Cycle of Corrosive Shame:** Summarize and discuss the teachings and diagram on the cycle of shame.

\*Note: If no one from the group feels secure discussing things they feel ashamed of, perhaps vulnerably reveal an example in your own life. Keep the group safe by not requiring members to speak about things they are not ready to share.

### **The Cycle of Grace (redemptive shame)**

#### **Contemplative Knowing**

**\*Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.** Read aloud Hebrews 12:1-2:

*"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (NASB)*

**\*Spiritual Discipline of Visio Divina.** As this is a new practice for most, allow time for discussion. Perhaps bring a color copy of Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son* to view while discussing, or cast an online image to an available TV.

**Keep in mind that some may find this new practice of meditation upon art to be a meaningful way to connect with God. To engage more deeply with the artwork referred to within the *Living Soul-Full* book, some leaders pull up open-access versions of the artwork online and cast to a TV screen for group viewing. Having a large, colorized version to view together can be a powerful experience.**

**As facilitator, you may want to add other works of art for the group to view that have touched your soul.**

**Two good sites for artwork are [artsandculture.google.com](http://artsandculture.google.com) and [wikiart.org](http://wikiart.org). An online search will provide other good options, as well.**

**Closing:** Read the following from the close of Chapter Eight:

*When you regarded me  
Your eyes imprinted your grace in me,  
In this, you loved me again,  
And thus my eyes merited  
To also love what you see in me....  
Let us go forth together to see ourselves in Your beauty.  
— St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle**



**VIII. Chapter Nine, Meeting Nine**  
*Living Soul-Full* book page 59  
**Rewiring Core Beliefs/Journal Reading**



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the story of Christ's encounter with the woman caught in adultery, closing after a time of silence.

*During this reading of one of Jesus' most impactful parables, place yourself within the story and, using your imagination, enter into this scene as fully as you can.*

*<sup>1</sup>Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup>At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup>and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup>In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you, who is without sin, be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (John 8:1-11 NRSV)*

*During these moments of silence, reflect upon the absolute lack of condemnation demonstrated in the person of Christ.*

### **Journal Reading**

#### **Reflecting on Childhood**

#### **Epigenetics**

#### **Core Beliefs**

**\*Summary: Understanding and Rewriting Our Core Beliefs:** Read this summary aloud, as well as Romans 12:1-2, our recurring theme verse:

*Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (NASB)*

**\*Additional Resources-It has been helpful in the past for groups to spend time with the questions in Appendix K, taking time to reflect upon these questions and then journal about any new revelations surrounding themes present in their families of origin. Others have already done this work or are not ready to examine the past that deeply. Let your own discernment prevail, perhaps offering an additional session for any who feel led to do this work.**

### Neuroplasticity—Spiritual Rewiring

**Closing: Review** the assignment for the next chapter, then read aloud the closing paragraph of Chapter Nine and scripture passages below:

*Long before we had the language of neuroscience, the Apostle Paul seemed to intuitively understand the soul-shaping power of intentional thought and action. He writes of demolishing mental strongholds to align our thinking with Christ and to participate in the Spirit's renewing work within us—one brave new thought at a time.*

*“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NIV)*

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8 NIV)*

## X. Chapter Ten, Meeting Ten

*Living Soul-Full* book page 67

### Origins of the Ego Self



**Opening:** Light the candle and read Colossians 3:5-15 **twice**, at the beginning and conclusion of the time of silence:

*<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

*<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

**During the silence between the two readings,** say: *Take time within the silence to meditate on these life-giving words. Let God's Spirit affirm and encourage your own spirit as you continue to show up for this work we are doing to "put on the new self." This not only brings healing to ourselves, but allows us to then more fully embody Jesus in our hurting world.*

After bringing this time to a close, select a date for your closing retreat and hold it sacred. Retreat plans can be downloaded at [LivingSoul-Full.com](http://LivingSoul-Full.com).

### Divine Embarrassment

### The Ego At Work

**Knowing What We Are Up Against**

**Closing:** Read aloud “Patient Trust” at the conclusion of the chapter.

## XI. Chapter Eleven, Meeting Eleven

*Living Soul-Full* book page 73

### Exposing the Ego



**Opening:** Light the candle and read Matthew 16:24-26 before observing a time of silence.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”*

Close as appropriate.

**Self-Denial:**

**True Intentions**

**The Shadow Self**

**A Dozen Deep Dives**

**Restoration**

**Closing:** Review next week’s assignments then lead the group in an experience of Lectio Divina: Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest.

**(Read) First Reading:** *Experience anew the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, told by Jesus in Luke 18:9-14 to illustrate the abiding love of God for sinners. Try to hear the passage as though you’re hearing it for the first time in light of this lesson. Allow the Spirit of God to speak through the Word and listen for a word or phrase that especially stands out for you right now.*

*“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by*

*himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*

*<sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

*<sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)*

**(Reflect) Second Reading:** *With the second reading, enter into this passage more deeply and pay attention to any emotions or reactions that rise up. Is there a personal struggle or longing in your life that God is speaking into?*

**(Respond) Third Reading:** *During this reading, receive what Christ has for you. Listen for an invitation from God, such as a new truth to embrace or a change to experience. What is your response to this invitation?*

**(Rest) Fourth Reading:** *As you listen the last time to this passage, release your thoughts and simply rest in the gift of scripture.*

## XII. Chapter Twelve, Meeting Twelve

*Living Soul-Full* book page 79

### Attachment vs. Non-Attachment/Journal Reading



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the following aloud before entering a time of silence:

*In his writings, Apostle Paul often uses the word "flesh" to describe our ego or sinful self. His references to the Holy "Spirit" reflect what defines our true, divine self. Listen to the following passages with this perspective in mind and enter into the silence, meditating on any new meaning received from the words "flesh" and "Spirit" in these verses:*

*"Those who live according to the **flesh** have their minds set on what the **flesh** desires; but those who live in accordance with the **Spirit** have their minds set on what the **Spirit** desires.<sup>6</sup> The mind governed by the **flesh** is death, but the mind governed by the **Spirit** is life and peace." (Romans 8: 5-7)*

*"But the fruit of the **Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)*

Close as appropriate.

#### **\*Counsel vs Spiritual Direction:**

Summarize this section and read together the Guidelines for *Living Soul-Full* Responses. Allow time for reflection upon these guidelines and discuss the assigned section on **WAYS TO LISTEN TO AND RESPOND TO OTHERS WITHIN A SPIRITUAL FORMATION GROUP** in Appendix E.

Now that you have modeled these ways to respond, some group members are ready to offer their own questions and/or images to others. Don't be hesitant to gently redirect a leading question or advice-giving, and let participants know there is no expectation for them to do or say anything after others read. As we have emphasized before, silence is often the most loving and appropriate response.

#### **Journal Reading**

**Attachment vs Non-Attachment in the Spiritual Life**

**\*The Secret:** Read this section and scripture aloud. If time is short, this can be your closing.

**Closing:** If time, you may choose to play “Give Me Jesus” by Jeremy Camp.

### XIII. Chapter Thirteen, Meeting Thirteen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 85

#### Idolatry, Addiction, and Love



**Opening:** Light the candle and enter into silence after reading the following quote from *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas R. Kelly (Please always give attribution to the author and source when reading quotations):

*Guidance of life by the Light within ... begins first of all in a mass revision of our total reaction to the world.... We are torn lose from earthly attachments and ambitions.... and we are quickened to a divine but painful concern for the world.... Positions of prominence, eminences of social recognition which we once meant to attain—how puny and trifling they become! No task is so small as to distress us, no honor so great as to turn our heads.*

#### Evaluation of the Covenant

#### Addiction to the Familiar

#### Questioning Our Certainty

#### Attachment-Idolatry- Addiction

#### Freedom in Chains

#### Step One

**Closing:** Review next week's assignment, and read aloud our theme verse from *Living Soul-Full*. Encourage your group to experience anew the truth and beauty of these living words.

**Consider** challenging the group to memorize Romans 12:1-2 within the next month.

*Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, NASB)*

**\*Note:** The next two chapters are also lengthy and may be difficult to get through in their entirety. 😊 Encourage your group to prepare as thoroughly as possible before each meeting and arrive on time. Feel free to add an extra meeting if necessary.



### XIII. Chapter Fourteen, Meeting Fourteen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 95

#### Role of Emotion



**Take the time you need to adequately explore and process the content in this chapter as you discern how best to lead through it.**

**Opening:** Read the following selection by Kahlil Gibran, asking the subsequent questions to meditate upon in the silence afterward:

*“Of Joy and Sorrow”*

*Then a woman said,*

*"Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow."*

*And he answered: Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.*

*And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.*

*And how else can it be?*

*The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.*

*Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?*

*And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?*

*When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.*

*When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.*

*Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."*

*But I say unto you, they are inseparable.*

#### **Reflection Questions:**

1. *Has your sorrow ever “carved” out a place in your spirit that allowed you to hold more joy?*
2. *Ponder on the relationship between the things that have caused you grief and the corresponding joy found in these things. (We grieve the loss of what we have loved.)*

Close out the time of silence as appropriate, perhaps reading the selection again.

**Before beginning the lesson, allow group members to speak of their experience with the Visio Divina assignment.**

### Listening To What We Feel

**\*Praise and Lament-**Ask group members to take turns reading the scripture verses in this section.

**\*The Darkest Psalm-**Read Psalm 88 aloud. (The NIV version works well.) After the reading, allow for a few moments of silence to process the intense nature of this Psalm before discussing.

*Lord, you are the God who saves me;  
day and night I cry out to you.*

*<sup>2</sup> May my prayer come before you;  
turn your ear to my cry.*

*<sup>3</sup> I am overwhelmed with troubles  
and my life draws near to death.*

*<sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am like one without strength.*

*<sup>5</sup> I am set apart with the dead,  
like the slain who lie in the grave,  
whom you remember no more,  
who are cut off from your care.*

*<sup>6</sup> You have put me in the lowest pit,  
in the darkest depths.*

*<sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavily on me;  
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.<sup>[d]</sup>*

*<sup>8</sup> You have taken from me my closest friends  
and have made me repulsive to them.*

*I am confined and cannot escape;*

*<sup>9</sup> my eyes are dim with grief.*

*I call to you, Lord, every day;*

*I spread out my hands to you.*

*<sup>10</sup> Do you show your wonders to the dead?  
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?*

*<sup>11</sup> Is your love declared in the grave,  
your faithfulness in Destruction<sup>[e]</sup>?*

*<sup>12</sup> Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,  
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?*

*<sup>13</sup> But I cry to you for help, Lord;  
in the morning my prayer comes before you.*

*<sup>14</sup> Why, Lord, do you reject me  
and hide your face from me?*

*<sup>15</sup> From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;  
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.*

*<sup>16</sup> Your wrath has swept over me;  
your terrors have destroyed me.*

*<sup>17</sup> All day long they surround me like a flood;  
they have completely engulfed me.*

*<sup>18</sup> You have taken from me friend and neighbor—  
darkness is my closest friend.*

Read aloud the paragraphs about Mother Teresa before the reflection question.

**Honoring Emotion**-Optional fun quote if you need to lighten things up: “*Some people say, ‘Never let them see you cry.’ I say, if you’re so mad you could just cry, then cry. It terrifies everyone.*”—Tina Fey, *Bossypants*

\***Anger**--Read aloud the identifiers of **Unrighteous and Righteous Anger** and **Gospel readings** from Matthew.

Time permitting, read **Psalm 109** aloud.

### **The Inner Witness**

**Closing:** Review next week’s assignment. Read aloud the final quotations in the chapter by **Martin Luther King, Jr.** and **Karen Armstrong.**



## XV. Chapter Fifteen, Meeting Fifteen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 105

### The Snare of Offense and the Inner Witness



**Opening:** Light the candle and read aloud the two following selections before entering into silence:

*“Communion with God also develops, perhaps more so, in darkness. In darkness, when we feel forsaken, we discover our desperate thirst for God, our consuming desire to know him, to experience him, to enjoy him. And concentrating on that desire, even as the experience of his absence deepens, is one form of communion, perhaps the one most pleasing to God.”* – Larry Crabb, *Conversations*, Spring 2008, p 26

*We pour out our miseries  
God just hears a melody  
Beautiful the mess we are  
The honest cries of breaking hearts  
Are better than a Hallelujah.*

– Chapin Hartman and Sarah Grant, from “Better Than a Hallelujah,” sung by Amy Grant

### The Discipline of Waiting

**\*Unburdening:** When you reach this section, lead the group through the following exercise.

**Read aloud:**

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...”* (Hebrews 12:1 NIV)

- *In the next few moments of silence, ask God to show you any offense or hatred you are carrying in your spirit that you are ready and willing to see. Experience this pain as you need to in these moments. (Pause for a few minutes as appropriate.)*

- *If you wish, you may cup your hands to symbolically hold this pain. Try to sense the limitations this pain has placed upon you in the expression of your truest self. Feel its*

*weight. When you are ready, lift it up as an offering to God. If you are able, let it go. (Pause...)*

- *Now ask God to bring to mind the faces of those that you need to release through forgiveness. If no one comes readily to mind, ask the Spirit to dig a little deeper. (Pause...)*

- *If you are able to at this time, hold the person/people you need to forgive in your cupped hands. Feel the weight of the resentment and bitterness that has taken root in your spirit because of what they have done to you or those you love. Try to sense the new space that will be freed up within you if you can release this weight of carrying this offense. Lift them up as an offering to God. If you are able, let them go.*

- *Now breathe and just be with and accept without judgment whatever you have experienced.*

After **some silence**, allow group members time to speak about any responses to this exercise.

## Developing the Inner Witness

### \*Exercise: Objectification of Emotion

Give space for each group member to speak about this exercise and read their new sentences. For those who may have struggled with this, provide encouragement and guidance.

### \*The Welcoming Prayer/Closing

In closing, lead the group through The Welcoming Prayer exercise below. Encourage members to put their books aside to enhance their focus. **Read the following aloud:**

*There are THREE parts to The Welcoming Prayer that we will experience together:*

***Part 1. Focus and sink in.*** *Take time in silence to notice your feelings and emotions. It is natural to repress, ignore, or resist feelings and pain we don't want to experience. Our emotions are not good or bad-they just ARE. Don't run away from or fight them. Take the time to identify offenses, thoughts, pain, hurt, and inner commentaries you are thinking/feeling/carrying in your body. Stay with this until you experience an authentic connection to your feelings or emotions, both on a heart and physical level. Notice what is happening in your body, as well. Where are you holding the pain and tension of this physically?*

**Part 2. Welcome.** *Accept these feelings/emotions. Sit with them until you experience a genuine sense that you are not fighting against them but just allowing them to be what they are. By acknowledging what is actually present in our hearts and minds, we bring these things into the light for the purpose of then being able to release them in the presence of God's unconditional love. We can then invite Christ's healing power into the present moment.*

*If you can simply observe the negative pattern in yourself, you have already begun to separate from it. Be conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the love of God surrounding you as you do this. Be aware that this is for your own transformation, as the Spirit cannot transform what we cannot or will not acknowledge.*

*Until we are able to welcome, or admit to, the reality of what is true within us, we cannot authentically share the pain of others. We can hold all this because we are being held by the very One who experienced the humiliation and suffering of the cross. Jesus was able to release his desire for retribution, in spite of the hatred directed against him. Even in his pain he offered unconditional forgiveness. His example and His Spirit can help us do the same.*

*A few have noted that the word "welcome" can feel uncomfortable or inauthentic. Keep in mind that we are not celebrating all our emotions, only bringing them into the light. If you cannot use "welcome," feel free to use another word or phrase that works for you, such as "I acknowledge."*

**Part 3. Let go.** *Attend to the three sets of emotional needs listed in the "Welcoming Prayer." Consider the unhealthy strategies are you using to get these needs met that are no longer "working" for you.*

- 1. Power and Control*
- 2. Affection, Esteem, and Approval*
- 3. Survival and Security*

*When and if you are able, try to release what you have identified and acknowledged over to God. Ask for the grace to be able to forgive, let go of offenses, and extend love and compassion to yourself and others. Allow yourself to experience in your heart and body a sense of freedom from these encumbrances and a return home.*

*Father Keating encouraged his students to imagine sitting on the bank of a river and observing all your thoughts and feelings floating by. Acknowledge those feelings and thoughts without judging or criticizing yourself, then let them float away downstream. Breathe deeply before we begin this prayer together.*

*Welcome, welcome, welcome.*

*I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing.*

*I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, and situations.*

**(Repeat, followed by 2-3 minutes of silence.)**

*I let go of my desire for power and control.*

*I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, and approval.*

*I let go of my desire for survival and security. (Repeat)*

*I let go of my desire to change the emotion, person, situation or feeling.*

*I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within.*

**(Repeat, followed by 2-3 minutes of silence.)**

**Go over next week's assignment** before dismissing. (For those who are interested in reading more about the state of offense, the referenced book, *The Bait of Satan*, is normally made available at several sites online as a free download.)

## XVI. Chapter Sixteen, Meeting Sixteen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 113

### Discernment/Journal Reading



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the following prayer by Jan Richardson. Encourage the group to pay attention to breath and body.

“Blessing in the Chaos”

by Jan Richardson

*To all that is chaotic in you, let there come silence.*

*Let there be a calming of the clamoring,  
a stilling of the voices that have laid their claim on you,  
that have made their home in you,*

*that go with you even to the holy places  
but will not let you rest,  
will not let you hear your life with wholeness  
or feel the grace that fashioned you.*

*Let what distracts you cease.  
Let what divides you cease.  
Let there come an end to what diminishes and demeans,  
and let depart all that keeps you in its cage.*

*Let there be an opening  
into the quiet that lies beneath the chaos,  
where you find the peace  
you did not think possible  
and see what shimmers  
within the storm.*

**Close out the time of silence** with this passage from Daniel about God's gift of discernment.

*“Blessed be the name of God from age to age,  
for wisdom and power are God's.”*

*God changes times and seasons,  
deposes kings and sets up kings;  
gives wisdom to the wise  
and knowledge to those who have understanding;  
reveals deep and hidden things;  
knows what is in the darkness,  
and light dwells with God.” Daniel 2:20-22 NRSVUE*

**\* Discuss last week’s exercise of the Inner Witness and “catching ourselves in the act” of emotional reactivity. Encourage group members to share any insights in this work of deep observation.**

### **Journal Readings**

**\*Discipline of Discernment-** Read aloud Isaiah 30:21 and Jeremiah 6:16

*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” Isaiah 30:21 NIV*

*This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jeremiah 6:16 NIV*

### **Heart, Head, and Gut Intelligence**

#### **Consolation and Desolation**

**\*Five Part Daily Examen by St. Ignatius of Loyola:** Review each of these five steps found in Appendix I.

**Closing:** Guide the group through the shortened Examen process:

*In preparation, place your feet flat on the floor and take a few deep breaths.*

1. *Place your hand on your heart and ask God to help you recall the moment today for which you are MOST grateful. If you could relive one moment, which one would it be? When were you most able to give and receive love today? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude you felt and receive life again from that moment. (Allow group members to “name” their moment.)*

2. *Ask God to bring to your heart the moment today for which you are LEAST grateful. When were you least able to give and receive love? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so difficult. Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are. (Allow group members to speak of this moment.)*

3. *Give thanks for whatever you have experienced.*

*By participating in this discipline, over time, we will be able to see themes within our lives that can help us discern what gives us life and what drains life from us. We can then begin to use this new awareness in our ever-increasing ability to discern God's presence and will in our lives.*

Review next week's assignment before departing.



## XVII. Chapter Seventeen, Meeting Seventeen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 121

### Surrender



**Opening:** Light the candle and, before entering into silence, read again the Thomas Merton prayer from **Chapter Two** in light of what we have discussed about discernment. Affirm that our desire to discern God's "good and perfect will" is affirmed, even if we get it wrong.

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.*

*I do not see the road ahead of me.*

*I cannot know for certain where it will end.*

*Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.*

*And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.*

*I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

*And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I know nothing about it.*

*Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.*

*I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

*Amen.*

Close as appropriate.

**\*Decision-Making vs Discernment:** Highlight the differences between these two concepts and give time to discuss last week's assignment of practicing the Examen.

### The Discipline of Surrender

#### Holy Indifference

**\*Lectio Divina: An Experience of Scripture:** Lead group members through this experience by reading the following aloud, allowing them to place their books aside and listen to the Word.

*In Matthew 19, we are given a compelling story from the ministry of Christ to illustrate the relationship between our attachments and surrender. When Jesus encountered the discontent of the Young Ruler, he saw the man's heart and was grieved that he had become enslaved by his possessions. This young man was **aware** that he was lacking something, but he did not yet have the insight or courage to surrender his security to receive what would bring him life.*

*The four moves of Lectio Divina are READ, REFLECT, RESPOND, and REST. During the first reading, pay attention to any word or phrase that especially captures your attention and touches your heart.*

**1. Read** Matthew 19:16-26 aloud:

*<sup>16</sup> Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

*<sup>17</sup> "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."*

*<sup>18</sup> "Which ones?" he inquired.*

*Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, <sup>19</sup> honor your father and mother, <sup>[a]</sup> and 'love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>[b]</sup>'"*

*<sup>20</sup> "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"*

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

*<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (NIV)*

**Ask:** "What particular word or phrase was especially meaningful to you? (Give members enough time to respond.)"

(Allow silence between readings as appropriate)

**2. Reflect**

*During the second reading, place yourself within this passage. Pay attention to any gut reactions or emotions that rise up. What personal struggle, issue, or longing in your life is God speaking into?*

**3. Respond**

*During the third reading, listen for a personal invitation from the Holy Spirit. Does God want you to receive or do something? If so, what is your response? (Allow some silence)*

**4. Rest**

*During the fourth and last reading, just relax and rest into the passage, with gratitude for the life-giving Word of God.”*

**Closing:** Time permitting, play the 2010 recording of the hymn, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken” from the Enfield Hymn Sessions-a moving musical experience about surrender.



## XVIII. Chapter Eighteen, Meeting Eighteen

*Living Soul-Full* book page 127

### The Practice of the Present



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the following Prayer of Surrender by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), followed by silence.

*Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
My memory, my understanding and my entire will.  
All I have and call my own You have given me.  
To you Lord, I return it.  
Everything is yours-- do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace;  
That is enough for me.*

Close silence as appropriate with this reading from Ephesians:

*“But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that is illuminated becomes a light itself. So it is said: ‘Wake up, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!’” (Ephesians 5:13-14 BSB).*

### Waking Up

### The Practice of the Presence

### Meeting the Moment

**Closing:** Review next week’s assignment.

**Say:** *As I read this familiar story of Jesus and the children from Mark 10:13-16, you are invited to remember moments of pure presence, wonder, and trust from your own childhood and what it felt like to live fully in the “now.”*

*People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to*

*such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.*

**Say:** *With the responsibilities and anxieties that accompany our adult lives, we can find solace in the untamed beauty of the natural world, allowing its wonder to draw us back into the childlike awe we once knew. We will close with this beloved poem by the great American poet and farmer Wendell Berry:*

### **The Peace of Wild Things**

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For the time  
I rest in the grace of the world and am free.*

## XVIII. Chapter Nineteen, Meeting Nineteen

*Living Soul-Full* page 133

### Divine Union/Journal Reading



**Opening:** *As discussed in last week's chapter, we know that God is just as near in a sink of suds as in a cathedral. To pay attention to what is happening now in a world that rushes past the moment can be a holy rebellion.*

*When Moses asked for God's name at the burning bush in Exodus 3, God replied, "Yahweh," meaning "I Am,"-- not "I Was" or "I Will Be." Our God is alive in the now.*

*As we enter into silence, consider these lines from Chapter 19 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, referencing God's presence in the burning bush and the beauty of seeing the miraculous in the ordinary:*

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."  
From poem "Aurora Leigh"*

**Allow time for discussion of last week's assignment on helpful practices and the questions from the beginning of the chapter on page 133.**

### Journal Reading

**\*Divine Union-**Discern what needs to be read aloud and emphasized/summarized while teaching and reviewing this concept.

**Read:** *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* John 15:5 NIV

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them*

*and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:20-23 NIV*

**\*The Sacred Pattern of Renewal:** Read aloud the quoted material in this section and gospel passages:

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45 NIV*

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. <sup>13</sup> “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:12-15 NIV*

(A visit to a local prayer labyrinth—easily found on Google—can be a meaningful experience for your group, as you purposefully walk slowly towards the center in a sacred space designed to help guide you into prayer, meditation, or reflection through movement. Don’t worry, for it is impossible to “do it wrong,” as the path in and back out is clearly marked with no dead ends or “tricks.” Read up on the ancient history of prayer labyrinths, if interested.)

## **Both/And**

### **“En Christo”**

**\*Julian of Norwich:** Reflect upon the life of this remarkable woman, and read aloud her two given quotations:

*All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.*

*First there is the fall, and then the recovery from the fall, and both are the mercy of God.*

**Closing:** Review the assignment for Chapter 20 and close with the following:

*... You have to love. You have to feel. It is the reason you are here on earth. You are here to risk your heart. You are here to be swallowed up. And when it happens that you are broken, or betrayed, or left, or hurt, or death brushes near, let yourself sit by an apple tree and listen to the apples falling all around you in heaps, wasting their sweetness. Tell yourself you tasted as many as you could.” — Louise Erdrich*

## XX. Chapter Twenty, Meeting Twenty

*Living Soul-Full* page 143

### The Beloved



**Opening:** Light the candle and reread “Patient Trust” by Teilhard de Chardin [te-yar duh shar-dan].

**Say:** *We will open this meeting with another reading of “Patient Trust” by Teilhard de Chardin from Chapter Ten. Since you last heard this, God’s Spirit has been slowly and steadily working in you, at your invitation and as you are ready. Celebrate this as you listen again. During the silence that follows, meditate upon the work of transformation taking place in you at this very moment. Focus on accepting “the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.”*

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God  
 We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
 to reach the end without delay  
 We should like to skip the intermediate stages.  
 We are impatient of being on the way to something  
 unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress  
 that it is made by passing through  
 some stages of instability and  
 that it may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you.  
 Your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,  
 let them shape themselves, without undue haste. Don’t try to force them on,  
 as though you could be today what time  
 (that is to say, grace and circumstances  
 acting on your own good will)  
 will make of you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new spirit  
 gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing  
 that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself  
 in suspense and incomplete.*

— Teilhard de Chardin, “Patient Trust”

**\*I Am My Beloved's and My Beloved is Mine:** Read aloud Ephesians 3:16-19 and A.W. Tozer quote on page 143:

*"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. [DIVINE UNION] And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that **surpasses knowledge**—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* (Ephesians 3:16-19)

### Love in Weakness

**\*Visio Divina:** *The Disciples* by Eugene Burnand (If you can obtain a color print, even from an online source, it will enhance the experience. Consider also, as mentioned previously, casting an image from your phone onto a television.)

**Say:** *Take a few moments to study this painting in silence.*

When ready, ask the group these questions:

***What moment in time has the artist captured?*** (It's difficult to see in a copy or black and white, but the artist has depicted a sky at sunrise on resurrection morning.)

***Which disciple do you think is Peter? Why?***

***How do the facial expression and posture differ between the two disciples?***

***Study the face of Peter that the artist has captured so profoundly. In studying his complex facial expression, gestures, and posture, what emotions do you sense that Peter is experiencing?***

(Answers will vary but should include: determination, intense anticipation, sense of urgency, apprehension, perhaps a racing heart because his hand is placed there, desire to be reunited and reconciled, belief battling with doubt, but above all, HOPE. Some have suggested that Peter is "counting the days" with his left hand, remembering now Jesus' statement that he would overcome death on the third day in John 20:3-4.)

***Try to place yourself in Peter's place, in light of his history with Jesus. What emotions would you be experiencing in the same circumstance? How assured would you feel of Christ's reception of you after your denial?***

### \*To Love the Imposter

Locate and read the "Letter to the Imposter" from Chapter Two in *Abba's Child* aloud.

\*Discuss anything else relevant from the assigned reading in Abba's Child.

**Optional:** Invite response to the following quotes from Chapters One to Four:

“Unwittingly I had projected onto God my feelings about myself. I felt safe with Him only when I saw myself as noble, generous, and loving, without scars, fears, or tears. Perfect!”

“We even refuse to be our true self with God-and then wonder why we lack intimacy with Him.”

“Our longing to know who we really are-which is the source of all our discontent-will never be satisfied until we confront and accept our solitude. There we discover that the truth of our belovedness is really true. Our identity rests in God's relentless tenderness for us revealed in Jesus Christ.”

“The imposter starts to shrink only when he is acknowledged, embraced, and accepted.”

**Closing:** Go over next week's assignment for clarity and play the song “Known” by Tauren Wells from 2017.

**Say:** *In closing, we will listen to the song “Known” sung by Tauren Wells and inspired by the following Timothy Keller quote from Chapter Eight:*

*“To be loved and not known is comforting but superficial; to be known but not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and fully loved is a lot like being loved by God.”*



## XXI. Chapter Twenty-One, Meeting Twenty-One

*Living Soul-Full* page 149

### The Gift of the Authentic Self/Journal Reading



As you move through the chapter, be sure to allow enough time near the end for each member to read their “Imposter” letter.

**Opening:** Light the candle and read **twice** the poem “The Way It Is” by William Stafford before entering a time of silence and at its conclusion.

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

**Say:** “As I read this poem again, reflect on your own interpretation of “the thread” as it relates to the pursuit of your authentic self within Divine Union.” (Allow group members to respond after your time of silence has concluded.)

#### Roles vs Responsibilities

**\*Review of the Inner Witness:** Read aloud the six steps.

#### The True Self

#### Share “Imposter” Letters Assigned Last Week

**Closing:** Review next week's assignments and read “Not A One” by Mark Nepo

*Not A One*

*A funny thing happened on my way to being awake.*

*I outgrew all my masks.*

*Not a one fit.*

*Not the one I called my past, not the one I called my dream,*

*Not the one I wore when sad, or the one I wore when trying to be happy.*

*I saved them all like favorite shirts I thought would fit when I became myself again.*

*But that was a mask, too.*

*Then just the other day I was more present than lost*

*And had to put down the mask I called My Story.*

*And today a gust of light filled my face. I felt it on my skin and in my soul.*

*Now anything is possible.*

— Mark Nepo

## XXII. Chapter Twenty-Two, Meeting Twenty-Two

*Living Soul-Full* page 155

### The Glory of the Authentic Self



\*Note-Please allow enough time at the close of this meeting for the sacred musical experience of “Chevaliers de Sangreal.”

**\*Opening/Centering Prayer:** After lighting the candle, lead the group in the Centering Prayer exercise as taught in Chapter 22 this week:

Guide the group through the four parts of Centering Prayer, briefly reviewing the **Four R's** before beginning.

While leading through this experience, it may help to give your group gentle reminders to return to their sacred word when thoughts wander. A soft “Amen” can signal moving to step 4 and gently ending the time of prayer.

1. *Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (Examples: Lord, Father, Abba, Peace, Trust, Yes, Amen, etc.)*
2. *Sit comfortably, with eyes closed if helpful, and gently and silently introduce the sacred word as you invite God's Spirit to surround you. Try to let go of what is going on around and within you.*
3. *When you become aware of unrelated thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. Random thoughts are a normal part of Centering Prayer and need to be accepted as part of the experience. The only activity we initiate during Centering Prayer is this return to the sacred word. Once you are immersed in God's presence, the sacred word may cease to be helpful. Just be with what is. **Allow several minutes of silence.***
4. *Amen. Come back to the present as you are ready.*

After some silence, allow others to talk about their experience of Centering Prayer, both now and/or last week while reading the lesson.

Discuss anything else relevant from the “Centering Prayer” Section in the chapter.

### Our True Identity

**\*Discuss anything personally relevant from the reading assigned in The Human Condition.** (Before the meeting, select some meaningful passages to read aloud, if needed.)

**\*From Glory to Glory:** Read all given scripture passages aloud, either by leader or group members.

*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in **glory**.”*  
(Colossians 3:1-4 NIV)

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's **glory**, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing **glory**, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18 NIV)*

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his **glorious** inheritance in his holy people. (Ephesians 1:18 NIV)*

*“The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the **glory** of the children of God” (Romans 8:21 NIV)*

## The Light We Carry

**Closing:** Review next week's assignment for clarity before playing “Chevaliers de Sangreal.” After listening, conclude your meeting as you feel led.

**Read aloud:** *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV)*

**Read** this introduction **before** playing “**Chevaliers de Sangreal**” by Hans Zimmer. (Speakers enhance this experience versus just playing it on your phone.)

*This selection begins softly and reverently, and as it progresses, becomes more intense, majestic, and uplifting when human voices join the musical instruments.*

*As the music swells, imagine living more fully into who you were created to be—nothing more and nothing less. Listen for an invitation to “go forth together” to see yourself through God's eyes. Allow yourself to be drawn closer to the heart of God, knowing you will shine even brighter as the light of Christ in the world*

## XXIII. Chapter Twenty-Three, Meeting Twenty-Three

*Living Soul-Full* page 163

### The Discipline of Community/Divine Love Letter



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the selection by Symeon the New Theologian from *Hymns of Divine Love*.

Encourage the group to take time in the silence to ponder the experience of Christ within heart, mind, and body.

#### \*Reading of Divine Love Letters

Take time now to read the love letters assigned last week. Instead of responding to each one, perhaps wait until everyone has shared before making any concluding comments.

#### Community-Not an Option

#### Delights and Sorrows

#### Bearing With Others

#### Triangulation: Read Aloud

*“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”*

(Ephesians 4:29)

#### Should I Stay or Should I Go?

#### Sore Feet

#### \*Lovingkindness Meditation

Facilitate the following exercise, beginning with **reading the following scriptures aloud:**

*“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold*

*your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36 NIV)*

*"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." (Colossians 3:12-15)*

**(Continue, saying...)**

*Reflect on the fruit of God's own Spirit that determines how we treat one another—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Gratefully focus on the truth that we have constant access to these gifts in each and every moment we are present to God. As we participate in the following meditation, allow God to supply in full measure what you most need to bring your own genuine loving presence to the world.*

*Take some full slow breaths and close your eyes if helpful.*

*Bring to mind someone for whom you feel tenderness and compassion and ask God to bless them. May they know peace. May they draw close to God's heart. May they be safe and healthy.*

**(Give a few moments...)**

*Think of someone, now, who is not within your inner circle, but someone you know casually and admire or appreciate. Ask Christ to give them good gifts. May they know peace. May they draw close to God's heart. May they be safe and healthy.*

**(Give a few moments...)**

*Now, think of someone who has hurt and angered you: perhaps an enemy, someone who has slandered you or someone you love, or a person you want to remove from your community. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, ask for compassion for this person, not knowing or understanding the pain they carry within themselves. Make an effort now to accept them from the overflow of Christ's love within your own spirit. Try to hold this person in a loving space as best you can and ask God to reveal Divine Love to them. May they know peace. May they draw close to God's heart. May they be safe and healthy.*

**(Give a few moments...)**

*Now, think of yourself. Purposefully think of yourself kindly. Think of a time when you were generous and self-sacrificing. Ask God to nurture your ability to be able to love and see yourself through Divine eyes. May I know peace. May I draw close to God's heart. May I be safe and healthy.*

**(Give a few moments...)**

*Continue to breathe in the compassion that is available to you through the Spirit in this moment, holding yourself and others with tenderness.*

**Closing:** Discuss the assignment for next week and read the closing quote in the chapter from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*"To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."*



## XXIII. Chapter Twenty-Four, Meeting Twenty-Four

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### Soul Hospitality



**Opening:** Light the candle and read Matthew 25:34-40 before the silence:

*Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."*

*Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"*

*The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

**Close the time of silence with prayer:**

*Jesus, help us to remember that love is not determined by our own estimation of the worthiness of each person, but by You who says that we are each the Beloved of God. Remind us that in any given moment, your love and compassion are available for us to bestow upon one another. Empower us to be your instruments for the outflow and overflow of the gifts of your Spirit. Amen.*

### Discussion of "Appendix L" Article

**\*"Oneing"**

Read John 17:20-23 aloud, as well as other quotations, time permitting.

### The Measure of Maturity

### Our Common Call

### Review: Listening with Intent to Understand

## Unconditional Positive Regard

### Self As the Wounded Healer

### Our Heart As Hospice

**\*Intercessory Prayer/Closing-**Discuss this section, then lead group in the following exercise to close the lesson.

**Read this section aloud to facilitate Intercessory Prayer, pausing between paragraphs.**

*Breathe and just be present to God's Spirit without expectation.*

*In the silence, ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a person you are invited to pray for. Allow yourself to trust God's love for this person, holding them with tenderness and compassion. Just try to be present with this in your heart space, releasing the need to fix or change anything right now. (Wait...)*

*In a stance of listening and receptivity, gently ask God, "What is your prayer for this person? What do you want MY prayer to be for this person?" (Wait...)*

*Ask God, "Is there anything for me to say or do in regard to this person?" (Wait...)*

*Ask God, "Is there anything I need to let go of in order to join your prayer for this person?" Pay attention to anything the Spirit presses upon you. (Wait...)*

*Lovingly and freely hand this person or situation over to God. Allow your heart to reflect the healing love of Christ for all of creation. If it is helpful, make a gesture or sign of your willingness to submit to God's will.*

*Finally, ask God for a prayer for YOU today. What would Jesus ask God for on your behalf? Try to listen intentionally and enter into the prayer that is already there for you in the heart of Love. Ask God for any new revelations.*

**(Wait an appropriate time, being mindful of people's attention spans.) Amen.**

**Review next meeting's assignment.**

## XXV. Chapter Twenty-Five, Meeting Twenty-Five

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### For the Sake of Others/Journal Reading



**Opening:** Light the candle and read the following quote by St. Teresa of Avila at the beginning and ending of silence:

*“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”*

**Discuss reflections on the questions from last week’s assignment.**

**\*Guidelines on Offering Compassionate Care to Others:** Take turns reading aloud the guidelines for compassionate care.

**A “Loving” Caution**

**Sharing Journal Entries**

**Visio Divina: Jesus of the People**

**The Chemistry of Tears**

**\*The Bowl of Tears Experience/Closing:** Read carefully to prepare in advance for facilitating this meaningful experience.

**Review** the final assignment for the next meeting before beginning The Bowl of Tears.

**Remind** group members to prepare a separate card for each person, and to bring them next week to give after reading them aloud..

**Bring** to this meeting some type of **pitcher** (a lovely glass pitcher allows others to see the “tears” before pouring them,) **hand towel**, and **bowl** large enough to hold about a quart of water. Leave ample time for this part of the lesson, as it can be very moving.

**Say:** *In today's culture we are often too busy to truly lament and allow ourselves to experience grief for the suffering in our world. As human beings and citizens of the world, we need to prayerfully attend to the pain of others, allowing Christ to supply us with HIS compassion. In our rush to fix problems, we neglect to give space and time to enter into God's love for the world. Often, simple rituals can help us connect to the suffering of others and process our own pain, as well.*

**Show group the glass bowl and pitcher of clear water. Place a hand towel next to the bowl.**

*“Allow the water in this pitcher to represent our tears for the world and all who are hurting, grieving, and lost.”*

**Pour water from the pitcher slowly now into the bowl, then set the pitcher aside. Leaders, go first to demonstrate this ritual and cup some water from the bowl with your hand. As the water trickles through your hands and fingers, speak out loud specific people or groups of people that God places upon your heart. (e.g., my grieving next-door neighbor, women imprisoned by sex trafficking, my sister-in-law who just was diagnosed with cancer, those whose lives have been destroyed by gossip, families trying to live through the loss of a beloved child, etc....) Pass this bowl to the person to your left, along with a small hand towel.**

*“As we pass this bowl to one another, scoop up some water and let it trickle through your fingers. Allow the Spirit to impress upon your spirit images of others in the world who are suffering and in need of healing and compassion. Before you pass the bowl, say aloud who your tears are for today. You may have one specific person or situation, or several. Feel free to name as many as you wish.*

*After each person has finished, we will join together in saying, ‘**Into your hands, Lord Jesus.**’”*

**Take your time with this experience, remembering to lead the group in saying, “*Into your hands, Lord Jesus*” after each person has spoken. Conclude your meeting with the following scripture:**

*Those who sow in tears  
shall reap with shouts of joy!  
<sup>6</sup> He who goes out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
bringing his sheaves with him. (Psalm 126:5-6)*

## XXVI. Chapter Twenty-Six, Meeting Twenty-Six

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### Communal Celebration



If the timing of your retreat aligns with this last lesson, this is a meaningful way to close the retreat. But it's more important to find a time that works for everyone, even if your retreat takes place a few months before finishing the study.

**Opening:** Light the candle and read aloud our theme verse from Romans 12:1-2:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**\*The Mobius Strip:** (Demonstrated by Parker Palmer in *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*.)

For this last gathering, open with an exploration of a Mobius Strip and its implications for spiritual transformation.

**Materials needed**—strip of paper for each person (12" long and 1" wide is ideal)

To create a Mobius Strip, connect the two ends of a paper strip with a half-twist before taping them together. You can find short instructional videos on YouTube by searching "How to Make a Mobius Strip." **Please watch one of these demonstrations and practice a few times** before leading the lesson. It's a simple shape, but easy to get wrong without a little rehearsal.

**Say:** *This simple strip of paper can be used to illustrate the relationship of our outer lives to our inner lives and summarizes what we have been striving for during our Living Soul-Full experience.*

**(Place the two ends together to form a regular circle, indicating the inside versus the outside of the strip.)**

**Say:** *Our outer lives are typically concerned with our image, our impact, the approval of others, and other ego props. Yet, our inner lives are what truly reflect our values, faith, and the soul God has given us.*

*In a world that judges by outward appearances, we often learn that revealing too much of our inner selves isn't "safe." Over time, the wall between our outer image and inner truth grows stronger. We begin to lose touch with our souls, fading into the roles we've learned to perform.*

*But eventually, as we have discovered together, this division becomes too painful, and we long for what is truest about ourselves to also be reflected on the outside. We desire to integrate these two selves, even though we know there is risk involved. Opening ourselves to Divine Love **(open the ends of the circle strip)** can give us the courage to take this risk.*

**(Now, twist one end of the strip and reconnect it.)**

**Say:** *If we separate the ends of this circle, twist them, and reconnect them, we can then create an interesting shape called the Mobius strip, which has the feature of being continuous and unbroken. We can put our finger on the outside surface, keep tracing it around to the inside surface, and then, eventually, surprisingly find ourselves on what "appears" to be the outside again. The longer we trace these surfaces, the harder it is to distinguish between the outside and the inside of this strip. In fact, they have merged to become one surface.*

*This figure now can represent the whole, healed self as we continue to mature spiritually and allow our inner self to be reflected on the outside.*

*This simple visual can remind you of your desire to live with integrity as you move forward in faith. Recognizing our longing for wholeness can help us make life-giving choices that reflect what is true and holy about who we are and who God is. Take this image as representative of your Living Soul-Full experience, aware of the opportunities you are given daily to think and act from this place of integrated inner and outer truth.*

**Allow others to speak of any insights or impressions of the object lesson.**

## **Transformation and Action**

### **Evaluation of Living Soul-Full Objectives from Chapter One**

## Self-Care in Ministry

### Sacred Companions

#### Both/Ands

**\*Time of Affirmation:** Before reading your cards of affirmation for one another, **read aloud** this quote from *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* by Rose Mary Dougherty:

*Every once in a while we meet another person or group of kindred spirits where for a brief period of time we have a glimpse into the way things could be, the community to which we are really called.... Even though we might not ever see them again, we know that there is something that we've "touched into" together. The essence of what we have "touched into" continues to be with us, nurturing our desire long after we are separated.*

Allow each group member a **chance to be the focus** as the groups reads their statements of gratitude for them before moving on to the next person.

**\*Blessing of the Hands:** Prepare carefully to facilitate the Blessings of the Hands. You will need anointing oil. (Simple olive oil works fine.) Read the directions below a few times before your meeting.

**Say:** *"With your hands resting in your lap, palms up, take a moment to examine them and experience the wonder, strength and maturity of your hands. Of all the hands that have ever existed, none have been imprinted with these unique fingerprints and handprints.*

*Imagine these same hands as the newborn baby you once were and with the child learning to write your own name.*

*Remember other hands you have known throughout your lifetime that have left their imprint on you. Consider the power that hands have.*

*Our hands can soothe, caress, beckon, hold, let go, empower, forgive, liberate, console. Our hands can also cast aside, reject, punish, imprison, belittle, and wound.*

*Our hands are not just for ourselves, but for others. Your hands are the hands that God desires to use to bring healing and peace to our world--hands that have been transformed in and by Love itself.*

*Offer up to God a silent prayer of gratitude for these hands that hold so many opportunities to show compassion when you are present and awake to the possibilities within each moment.*

**Take a few moments of silence for meditation, then say:**

*As a symbol of our desire to live in step with the Holy Spirit as a healing presence, we are going to close our time together by anointing one another's hands with oil to represent the commissioning of Christ upon each of us to live out this sacred calling."*

**As leader, begin by anointing the hands of the person to your left. Using anointing oil, make the sign of the cross on both palms and pray over each person the following "Blessing of the Hands."**

*"Blessed be these hands that will touch and help to hold the pain and suffering of the world.*

*Blessed be these hands that will participate in the joy of healing.*

*Blessed be these hands though they may be clenched in anger or withdrawn in fear.*

*Blessed be these hands though they may grow stiff with age.*

*Blessed be these hands, for they do holy work.*

*Thank you, \_[name]\_ for the work of your hands."*

**Allow each person to anoint the hands of the person on their left while YOU read the blessing over each person, personalizing it as appropriate.**

**Closing:** Select a song to play as a "send-off" in closing. You can choose any song that has been meaningful to you and/or your group during your time together.

**Suggestions:**

**"God of Justice"** by Tim Hughes (this is just perfect—listen!!)

**"For the Sake of the World"** by Bethel Live featuring Brian Johnson (also perfect)

**"Gathering of Spirits"** by Carrie Newcomer (beautiful lyrics appropriate to an "ending")

**As the "last word," close with speaking our theme verse in unison:**

*Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, NASB)*

Dear Facilitator Friend,

If you have persevered to reach this conclusion of *Living Soul-Full* with one or more sacred companions, then you have honored the world-wide community of Christians, past, present, and future, by your desire to live more fully as the face of our compassionate God. It is my deep prayer that the Spirit has met you with joy and reverence, affirming your desire to please God by bringing others along on your own journey of ongoing transformation into the likeness of Jesus.

Gratefully,  
*LB*

## Facilitator's Toolbox

Add resource pages here to use to enrich your meetings, especially if you end with time to spare, as well as suggestions for your own spiritual growth and renewal.

1. Invite your group to compose, either individually or in community, a Collect (pronounced KAHL-lect), based on what has been discussed in the most recent chapter.

### What is a Collect?

A **collect** is a short, structured five-part ancient prayer that gathers the prayers of a community into a single, focused petition. Traditionally used in the church, it addresses God, names a particular attribute of God, asks for help aligned with God's will, and ends with a hope rooted in God's promise. Its purpose is not eloquence but *collecting* hearts and intentions before God.

### The Five Parts of a Collect

1. **Address**  
Naming God, often with a specific title or relational name.  
(For example: "Holy and loving God...")
2. **Acknowledgment**  
Naming something true about God's character or action.  
(For example: "You are the source of all wisdom and peace...")
3. **Petition**  
Asking for what is needed in the present moment.  
(For example: "Grant us the grace to listen with open hearts...")
4. **Purpose or Aspiration**  
Naming the hoped-for result, often oriented toward love, faithfulness, or service.  
(For example: "So that we may be shaped more fully into the likeness of Christ...")
5. **Conclusion**  
Offering the prayer through Christ, or affirming trust in God's faithfulness.  
(For example: "Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.")