

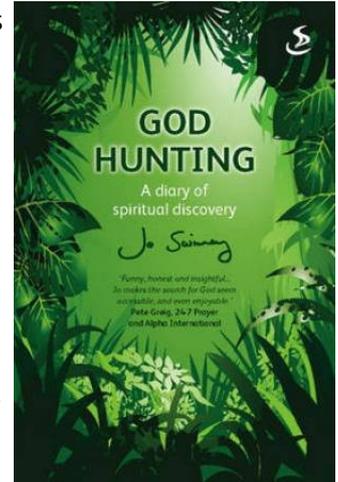
God Hunting: a diary of spiritual discovery

Jo Swinney (Scripture Union, 2011)

There are still all too few Christian books written by women, except for books *about* women or specifically *for* women. So I was delighted to come across this new book by Jo Swinney.

Subtitled 'a diary of spiritual discovery', Swinney covers six of the traditional spiritual disciplines, so in some ways the book covers familiar areas. But what impressed me most about Swinney's approach is that she not only explores the disciplines of prayer, fasting, Bible, worship, solitude and simplicity, she sets herself the challenge of spending one month practising each of them.

Each chapter of the book introduces the discipline, including reference to spiritual writers and her own aspirations, then comments on each of the four weeks spent on the discipline, concluding with final reflections on what she has learnt. Also included is an interview with an 'expert' on that area.



I found the 'busy' background of the interview sections a trifle irritating as it made the text difficult to read; and the book's cover does not do it justice. But don't let these design niggles put you off.

As someone who has read at least three of the 'classics' on spiritual disciplines, I wondered what I would find that was new. I found Swinney's honest and direct style very refreshing, and each chapter gave me some new insights. The spiritual disciplines are important for all Christians, but as leaders we can often find ourselves feeling guilty when we do not always practice what we preach; this book did not have that effect, but encouraged me to persist even when I find it hard.

I also liked the way Swinney adapted the disciplines to her own situation. When she came to fasting, she was 19 weeks pregnant, so fasting from food was out. Instead she fasted from fiction, hot drinks, media and sugar, four things that were important to her. With a toddler in tow and her second child born mid-writing, there is a groundedness about the book – it's not written by a theology professor in an ivory tower. One example is the very simple list of why she finds prayer difficult.

Swinney believes – and shows – that coming close to God is not something to be put off until we are 'less busy'. With humour and insight she finds God in the realities of everyday life. For example, the two-day retreat she has planned at a convent is replaced by an unscheduled week in hospital after experiencing contractions six weeks early. Finding real solitude in this situation proved very hard for her.

I was pleased to see that Swinney cites women as well as men who have written about the spiritual life. One example is Madame Guyon, whom she quotes several times in the chapter on prayer.

Mothers with young children, and those who don't particularly enjoy reading, would, I think, particularly relate to this book (it has only 126 pages, the type-face is clear, and the book is well laid out.) But I would commend it to *all* who are serious about coming near to God. Read it, try out the disciplines, and then pass the book on to a busy young woman in your church!

'This is an exciting adventure, and terrifying at the same time, because if we search for God, he will be found by us, and then there's no knowing what might happen.'

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