SPIRITUAL SMORGASBORD
Additional Handouts for the Spiritual Life of the Leader

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change.

James 1:17

Still Life, Floris van Dyck

Extending our Palate – Examining our Preferences

Smor·gas·bord

1. A buffet meal of various hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, salads, casserole dishes, meats, cheeses, etc.
2. An extensive array or variety:

Hairy Bikers – comfort grub – simple, comforting, homely, familiar

or

Master Chef – culinary curiosity – inventive, challenging, exotic, untried.

You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognise the difference between right and wrong.

Hebrews 5:12-14

'It's time to give ourselves a shake, to recognise that different people need different kinds of help at different stages of their lives, and to get on with it.'

Simply Christian, Tom Wright

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Art – Historic and Contemporary, Religious and Secular

Annunciation, Sandro Botticelli

'I am a comedian and I am completely unqualified to talk about art. However, I do go to art galleries a lot, and I like looking at art and thinking about art, and to me that is all the qualifications you need. For my theme I've chosen The Annunciation, which is that moment from the Bible when the Angel Gabriel appears to The Virgin Mary to tell her that she's going to have a baby. I chose it because it's a moment when the ethereal world joins in with the real world. I like the idea of the supernatural meeting the normal.'

Frank Skinner, comedian, West Bromwich Albion fan.

www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/guidedtours/frank-skinner

See www.lindisfarne-scriptorium.co.uk/

'To look at an icon of Christ is to do far more than view an image of a human life lived long ago. As Christians in the Orthodox tradition have understood for nearly fifteen hundred years, it is to be brought into the presence of the one who radiates the light and force of God. Such an encounter cannot leave us unchanged. Looking at Jesus seriously changes things; if we do not want to be changed, it is better not to look too hard or too long.'

The Dwelling of the Light, Rowan Williams

Biographies

'Nicky's story is possibly the most dramatic in the history of the Pentecostal movement, but it is not unique... It is natural to suspect the genuiness of changes that are so radical and abrupt. But there is no theological reason to discount them. God's grace can take hold of a person in an instant and transform a sinner into a saint. God Himself is quietly gathering new guests for His banquet. And He is gladly taking in those who, by human standards, are spiritually and morally poor, crippled, blind and lame.'

Prof Edward D. O'Connor, Foreword, Run Baby Run by Nicky Cruz

Dreams and Visions

Then, after doing all those things, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.

Joel 2:28

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The Examen

'For what am I most grateful? For what am I least grateful?'

Sleeping with Bread by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

'The deep purpose – and effect – of the Examen is to change our way of seeing. If we pray the examen regularly, generously, and courageously, God will come and live in our eyes. Gradually we will begin to see ourselves, and understand our actions, in a whole new way.

Usually most helpful if prayed in the quiet just before sleep, the Examen usually takes about 15 minutes and consists of five parts: first thanksgiving, then a prayer for illumination, next the examination of the day itself, followed by appropriate sorrow or delight, and finally, hope for the morrow.

The Praying Life, Deborah Smith Douglas

History of the Church – Lives of the Saints

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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

'Help is at hand not least from those who have trodden the path ahead of us.'

Tom Wright

'Are the prayers of the saints like sweet smelling incense to your heart, to your heart?'

Matt Redman

O almighty God,
Eternal, righteous and merciful,
Give us poor sinners to do for your sake
All that we know of your will,
And to will what always pleases you;
So that inwardly purified, enlightened
And kindled by the fire of your Holy Spirit
We may follow in the steps
Of your well-beloved Son,
Our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi, 1182-1226

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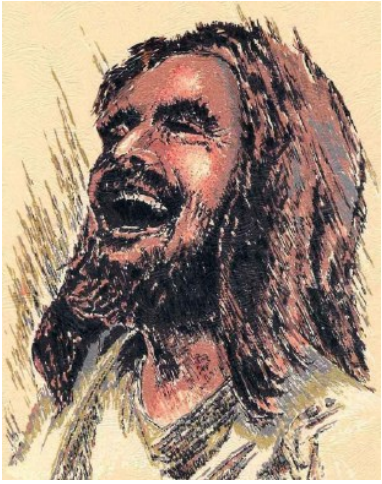
Humour

'Use your sense of humour. Laugh about things, laugh at the absurdities of life, laugh about yourself, and about your own absurdity. We are all of us infinitesimally small and ludicrous creatures within God's universe.'

Michael Ramsey



Jesus Laughing, Ralph Kozak

Jesus Prayer

'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'

'Do not trouble about the number of times you say the prayer. Let this be your sole concern, that it should spring up in your heart with quickening power like a fountain of living water.'

Theophan the Recluse. For more information read The Jesus Prayer by Simon Barrington-Ward, BRF or Spirituality Workbook by David Runcorn

Liturgies and Prayer Collections

'Part of our difficulty here is that we moderns are so anxious to do things our own way, so concerned that if we get help from anyone else it won't be authentic and come from our own heart, that we are instantly suspicious about using anyone else's prayers. We are hamstrung by the long legacy of the Romantic movement on the one hand and Existentialism on the other, producing the idea that things are only authentic if they come spontaneously, unbidden, from the depths of our hearts.

There is nothing wrong, nothing sub-Christian, nothing to do with 'works- righteousness', about using words, set forms, prayers and sequences of prayers written by other people in other centuries. Indeed the idea that I must always find my own words, that I must generate my own devotion from scratch every morning, that unless I think of new words I must be spiritually lazy or deficient – that has the all-too-familiar sign of human pride, of 'doing it my way', of, yes, works-righteousness. Good liturgy can be, should be, a sign and means of grace, an occasion of humility (accepting that someone else has said, better than I can, what I deeply want to express) and gratitude.

For a great many Christians, discovering that there are ways of being helped in prayer by using words and forms written and shaped by others comes as good news, as a sigh of relief.'

Simply Christian, Tom Wright

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The Lord's Prayer

'The Lord's Prayer is verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore perfectly worded. It is a revelation of how we should pray because it mirror's God's will for his people. It cannot be stressed too much that Jesus himself is the formulator of it, every single word, and if you want to know – at least once – that you prayed in God's will, the Lord's Prayer is for you.

I would therefore urge that the Lord's prayer be prayed with other believers and also that you pray this alone. Include it in your family devotions. Pray it with your room-mate. Pray it on your way to work. Pray it at work. Pray it with friends. Pray it at Bible studies. Pray it in small groups. Pray it as often as you feel like it – but do so from your heart.'

The Lord's Prayer, R.T. Kendall

Prayer Journals

'Reflection through meditation on life has been a great way to see where God might want to bring change, and journalling is one tool to do this.'

Growing Leaders, James Lawrence

Prayer Place

'When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.'

Matthew 6:6

'I think of a woman I once met whose husband hated to see her praying. When I asked her how she coped she told me that every evening she and her husband watched television together. During the 'commercials' she would close her eyes. Her husband thought she was snoozing but she was spending a few quiet moments with God. And, of course, despite the noise and the distractions, God honoured these few snatched moments with him.

This woman reinforced Brother Ramon's observation that just as people in love "always manage to find a place to be alone together, to be lost in each other's presence, and to enter into loving communion" so people who are serious about deepening their relationship with God create a place where they can meet him. When they find such a place they may well discover that, over a period of time, a powerful atmosphere is generated so that their sanctuary becomes prayer saturated. Still. A corner of the world where God's presence is uniquely felt.'

Open to God, Joyce Hugget

A Hidden Fire, Brother Ramon

'On a day travelling – with, perhaps, some ghastly meeting at the end of it – I'd rather pray sitting in a crowded train than put it off till midnight when one reaches a hotel bedroom with aching head and dry throat and one's mind partly in a stupor and partly in a whirl. On other, and slightly less crowded days, a bench in a park, or a back street where one can pace up and down, will do.'

Letters to Malcolm, Chiefly on Prayer, C.S. Lewis

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Quiet Days/Retreat

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.
Mark 1:35

Despite Jesus' instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.
Luke 5:16

One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.
Luke 6:12

'What we can learn from Jesus' example is that we must all have our secret places when we can be away from people so that we can spend time in uninterrupted prayer.'
Jesus Driven Ministry, Ajith Fernando

'Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ('turn stones into loaves'), to be spectacular ('throw yourself down'), and to be powerful ('I will give you all these kingdoms'). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity ('You must worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone'). Solitude is the place of the great struggle against the compulsions of the self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.'
The Way of the Heart, Henri Nouwen

Stories

'Some of the stories I fashion myself, pleading your patience with my poor Imagination, and praying it be righteous to shape your truth into fiction. But others happened to me, truly, through your grace; and I hope the people realize that what is mine is theirs by virtue of your universal presence.

Convince them of your love, O Lord. And I use the forms they understand: drama, poetry and essay, fable, letters, memoirs, any form whereby the words may cry the Word.

Because I love you, and I love them too. But yours is the mightier love, and I wish they knew it. Oh! I wish they could laugh out loud for the knowledge of your love for them. Give them ears, thou roll of thunder, and feeling for your presence– in this book because I love you...'
Walter Wangerin, Introduction, Ragman