Developing a Life of Prayer
Contemporary and Classic Devotional Guides

Contemporary Writers


Nouwen, Henri J.M. *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery*. New York: Image Books, 1981. Nouwen's writings are meditative, beautiful, honest, and sometimes painful -- but they lead, as they focus on Christ, to healing. His is another name to watch for -- he's written a number of books. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of Self*. New York: Image Books, ?. This book is a searching examination of the heart's journey away from a self-centered preoccupation to a preoccupation with God and others. In the Name of Jesus New York: Crossroads, 1989. This is a refreshing take on what it means to be a leader. He looks at the temptations Jesus faced and explores their implications for our leadership today. A great little book. Anything by Nouwen is worth the read -- and the high price! *The Way of the Heart*. New York, Ballantine1981. This is a winsome call to recover the practices of solitude, silence, and prayer. It is very simple and very rich. A good start in exploring these essential disciplines.

O’ Siadhail, Micheal *Hail! Madam Jazz*. New Castle: Bloodaxe Books, 1992. An Irish Catholic poet who's work is earthy, rich and full or surprises!!!

Peterson, Eugene H. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, ?. A study of the Psalms of Ascent. Peterson has a number of other worthwhile books in which he also delves into scripture. Watch for his name.
Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer. Learning to pray from psalms. This is a very rich exploration of the ways in which we respond to God's initiative in our lives.

The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989. Peterson knows well the temptation of allowing the work to shape our inner lives rather than the other way around. This is a very practical and insightful book on living as a contemplative in the midst of demanding ministry.


Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1992. What happens when you are called to a group of people you don’t like and to do a job you don’t feel like doing? In this imaginative reading of the book of Jonah Peterson gives us help in living with integrity as ministers. A MUST READ!

SUFFICE TO SAY--ANYTHING OF PETERSON’S IS GREAT

Postema, Don. Space for God: The Study and Practice of Prayer and Spirituality. Grand Rapids, MI: Bible Way (CRC Publications), 1983. Reflections, reading selections, art (much by Van Gogh), and exercises for developing a deeper spiritual life. This is from a Reformed perspective.

Powers, Jessica. Powers, A Carmelite nun, has beautiful prayerful poetry that has greatly aided me in my life of prayer. It is simple, honest and most of all affectionate. Look for her work. Two books by Robert Morneau have used her poetry as a scaffolding around which Morneau has developed a series of prayer retreats. Poetry as Prayer: Jessica Powers, Boston, MA: Pauline, 2000. And Jessica Powere: Loving a Passionate God. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1995.

Rolheiser, Ronald. The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God. New York, NY: Crossroads, 2001. I don’t hear from God. I don’t sense his presence. I don’t see his activity in my life. These are concerns that many of us have in our life of prayer. Rolheiser explores the reasons for these dilemmas in the contemporary human person. He looks at the philosophically, sociologically and biblically reasons that contribute to our lack of awareness of God and what creates in us personalities that are profoundly non-contemplative. It is not just diagnostic—he also helps us point to a way out of this dilemma. He is a good writer and makes complex arguments accessible.

Rolheiser, Ronald, The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality. New York Double Day, 1999. Spirituality is a term that gets bandied about a great deal these days. What does it mean? How can we be sure what is meant by this term, and what are the basic elements of a truly Christian Spirituality? Rolheiser looks at the essentials—Christian spirituality is Biblical, incarnational, ecclesiological, cruciform, justice oriented, peaceful, and it involves the whole of who we are, including our sexuality. This is an excellent book exploring these basics, which we never can get too much of.


Simon, Caroline J. The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny & Imagination. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. We speak a lot about love—loving God, our neighbor and ourselves, but often we are not exactly sure what love looks like and how it forms us in each of these spheres. Simon’s book is an excellent exploration of the working of love in our lives and why it is the center of who we are and how we are to live.


encourages aggressive living Van Kaam points out that the life of faith is an open handed life, it is a gentle life, it is a life of giving and receiving love. This book radically changed how I view the Christian life.

**Classics on Meditation, Prayer & Spiritual Reading**


Bunyan, John. *Pilgrim’s Progress*. This is a classic Christian allegory which describes well the vicissitudes of the Christian life.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960. Calvin has been much maligned for his heartless rationality, but if you will try reading him, you will find that this is just not so. Not only is this an expansive examination of Christian doctrine, but it is a searching examination of the human heart, done with heart! (esp. book 3 on “The Christian Life”)

**Classics of Faith & Devotion** -- a series of Christian classics for spiritual reading edited by Dr. James M. Houston and published by Multnomah Press, Portland, OR 97266. If these were the only books that you had on your shelf, they would fill your heart with more than enough spiritual insight to last your lifetime. In particular I recommend *Toward a Perfect Love* by Walter Hilton, a 14th-century man of prayer who will point you to the rich journey of walking in the love of Christ; *The Mind on Fire* by Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century scientist, philosopher and passionate man of faith (this is a collection of brief thoughts about all areas of Christian devotion -- he speaks loudly to the philosophical, behavioral and emotional issues of our day); *Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards, an 18th-century Puritan, President of Princeton, and missionary/pastor, in which he explores the difference between true and false religious behavior; *The Love of God* by Bernard of Clairvaux, a 12th-century Cistercian Abbot, who answers the questions of love -- what it means to be loved by God and what it means to love Him; and *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter, a 17th-century English Puritan, who had a great influence on the Puritan movement both in England and here in America, writing about what it means to care for others and how to lead them to God. *The Life of Prayer* by Theresa of Avila, 16th–century nun who takes the reader on a tour of the soul, pointing our how it grows in its love for God in prayer.


*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* ed. Benedicta Ward SGL. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975. This is a great introduction to the Desert Fathers -- a protest movement in the 4th-5th centuries. Like our time, the church in the c. 4th and 5th was going through great change and secularization these men left the cities for the desert in order to do battle with and in prayer. Wild, challenging reads!

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. London, Penguin Books,1958. This has been called the best of Christian novels, and it is true. It is an amazing work of art. As you read it, you will find it reading you and your friends. A thick book, but one which every Christian should read.

Eliot, T.S. *The Complete Poems and Plays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952. Much of Eliot is still beyond me, but that which I grasp is rich and searching of my heart. He is worth working to understand, for he has much to say to us about our spirituality.

Fenalon, Francois *Talking with God*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 1984. This 18th century Arch-Bishop of Paris was the Spiritual Director of his time, he was advisor and confessor to Kings, French royalty and criminals alike. His insight into the psychology of sin and his hope in the transforming power of Christ are great challenges. If you can find his letters of Spiritual Direction they too are wonderful.

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:
Gregory the Great, Pastoral Care.  [http://ccel.wheaton.edu]  Gregory was Pope in c. 585 and wrote this text to help his priest understand their jobs and the spiritual pitfalls inherent in living out their vocation.  It is a very heart searching read.

Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses.  New York: Paulist Press, 1980.  Gregory (c.330 –c.395) is the most accessible of the Greek Mystical Theologians.  His reading of Exodus and Deuteronomy is imaginative and wild.  He sees Moses as the archetypal human being and explores the life of faith for us all through his life.


Herbert, George.  The Country Parson, The Temple.  Classics of Western Spirituality Series, New York: Paulist Press, 1981.  Herbert is a great help in understanding the care of those God has give you and developing a clearer pastoral theology.  His language is rich and poetic.  The Temple is a collection of his poems and prayers.  The beautiful and wonderful aids to prayer.

Lewis, C.S.  Letters to Malcolm.  London: Harvest Books, 1964.  This is a practical guide to prayer.  With typical Lewis insight and practicality the reader is given insight into the mystery of prayer.


Thomas a Kempis.  The Imitation of Christ (variously published)  This is not my favorite book because of the heavy emphasis he places on behavior in the Christian life.  It can come across as legalistic.  With that said, it has some very insightful views into both the human heart and the heart of God.  -- Worth a critical read

Von Balthasar, Hans Urs.  Prayer.  San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1955.  This is by far the best book of prayer I have ever read.  It is deep, practical and warm.  It is a book that one must read slowly over a life time.  A must!

Web Sites:

http://elvis.rowan.edu -- Biographies of Saints and Scholars of the Church organized according to the Church year.

http://anglicansonline.org -- A great site for the liturgically minded. It has lots of resources and links – the best of which is the Daily Office liturgies for Morning and Evening Prayer.

http://www.dur.ac.uk/~dcs0mpw/gkc/books/index.html -- A complete source for G.K Chesterton – an early 20th century Catholic writer. Chesterton had tremendous influence on Lewis – when you read him you will see the similarities.

http://ccel.wheaton.edu – This online library has a great collection of Christian Devotional and Theological classics – all public domain.  I download whole books.  Great site and there are lots of others like it.