

# An Interactive Life with God

Jan Johnson <https://JanJohnson.org>

## The Committee the “Lives in your Head”

Picture Perfect Christian  
Rescuer

Kickback Kid  
Attitude Police

We really can become people who . . .

- live with joy and gratefulness
- bless enemies (difficult people)
- don’t hold grudges
- are not resentful
- care deeply about others
- don’t run off at mouth but offers caring words
- go the extra mile
- live with purposeful intentionality
- are humble, letting go of pride, not grabbing the credit, not engaging in power struggles
- never, ever judging—that’s God’s job

*Genuine change* is possible; it’s what the world is hungry for.

We really can:

“*grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” 2 Pet 3:18

“*participate* in the divine nature” 2 Peter 1:4

So, C. S. Lewis writes, our faith is not a matter of our hearing what Christ said long ago and “trying to carry it out.” Rather, “The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself. He is beginning, so to speak, to ‘inject’ His kind of life and thought, His Zoe [life], into you; beginning to turn the tin soldier into a live man. The part of you that does not like it is the part that is still tin.”<sup>13</sup> Divine Conspiracy 28

Following Jesus is RELATIONAL and PERSONAL, not MECHANICAL

Mechanical: If I do A, God will do B.

Reducing God to a vending machine into whom I must pour coins or a 911 emergency operator.

Wanting God for God’s own self (not for what I can get from God).

[illegible]

## Movement toward God

John 15 <sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that **bears** no **fruit**. Every branch that **bears fruit** he prunes to make it **bear more fruit**. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>**Abide** in me as I **abide** in you. Just as the branch cannot **bear fruit** by itself unless it **abides** in the vine, neither can you unless you **abide** in me.

ABIDING  
vv. 4-7, 9-10  
**ONENESS**  
**UNION**  
(friend of God, joy,  
requests answered)  
vv. 7, 11, 14-16



**FRUIT BEARING**  
(character change)  
vv. 2-5, 8, 16

OBEDIENCE  
Keep commands  
Loving behavior  
vv. 10, 12-14, 17

<sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who **abide** in me and I in them **bear much fruit**, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not **abide** in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you **abide** in me, and my words **abide** in you, **ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you**. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you **bear much fruit** and become my disciples.

<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; **abide** in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will **abide** in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and **abide** in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my **joy may be in you**, and that **your joy may be complete**.

<sup>12</sup>This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have **called you friends**, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and **bear fruit, fruit that will last**, so that the **Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name**. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Abiding is about spiritual formation: using certain practices to cultivate an inner life strongly connected to God.

Result: transformation of outward behavior to Christlikeness. (*When the Soul Listens*, p. 31)

### VIM: VISION, INTENTION, MEANS

**Vision:** Life in the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21)

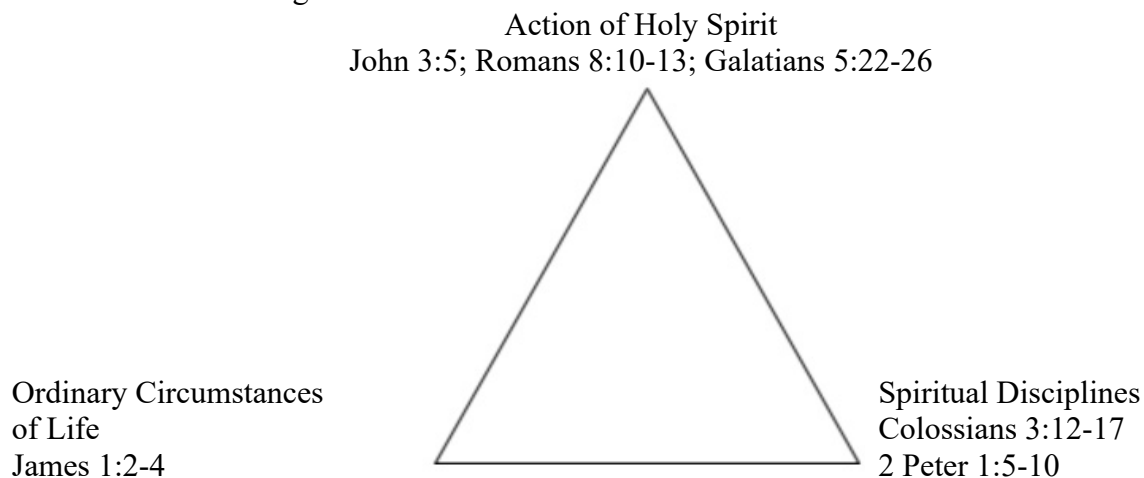
Transformation is possible: Colossians 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4; 2 Peter 3:18

**Intention: Staying focused.** Have I decided I would like to be transformed into Christlikeness?

Am I willing to respond to God's invitation?

Parable of man finding buried treasure (Matthew 13:44-45)

**Means:** Golden Triangle



**SPIRITUAL FORMATION QUESTION:** How will I arrange my life so transformation is more likely to occur?

ENGAGEMENT (activities you do)	ABSTINENCE (refraining from activities)
Study	silence
Scripture meditation	frugality
Prayer	secrecy
Service	solitude
Submission	sacrifice
Confession	chastity
Worship	vigils (not sleeping)
Celebration	fasting (e.g. from eating food, spending money, or watching TV)
fellowship or community	

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# Practicing the Presence of God

“pray without ceasing” 1 Thessalonians 5:17, KJV

“constantly remember you in my prayers at all times” Romans 1:9,10;

“night and day pray most earnestly that we may supply what is lacking in your faith” (1  
Thessalonians 3:10)

Paying attention to God, who is always there.

Resting in God's presence, wasting time with God.

Continual yearning of the human spirit toward God because *God is closer to us than we are to ourselves* St. Augustine

## Breath Prayers

Examples: Into Thy hands. Show me this person's heart.

- What favorite Scripture verses could you turn into breath prayers?
- What would be a good breath prayer to offer when someone makes a comment or tells a joke you don't like?

## Every Action Becomes A Prayer

Life is no longer compartmentalized -- all of life belongs to God.

Use simple reminders – even out of place ones.

## Draw From Pictures In Scripture

Luke 15:5-6 The shepherd joyfully carrying you home on his shoulders.

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# Solitude & Silence

## Replacing Hurry with Stillness

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Solitude: choosing to step free from human relationships for a period of time.

It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be *hasty* and miss the way. Prov. 19:2

- Jesus and solitude: Matt. 4:1-11; 14:13, 23; 17:1-9; 26:36-46; Mark 6:31; Luke 5:16; 6:12
- Paul: Galatians 1:17,18; Acts 20:13-14
- Old Testament figures: Jacob, Elijah, Moses

Be still and know that I am God Ps. 46:10

Solitude is a way to *practice* being “hidden with Christ in God” Col. 3:3

Solitude is different from loneliness:

Loneliness = empty, hollow Solitude = rich, full

Solitude exposes our addictions: being hooked on productivity

### Start Slowly

- Practice crabgrass contemplation or walking with Scripture.
- Don’t be a martyr. Be comfortable.
- Dismiss the committee that lives in your head gently.

### Situational Silence (as God leads)

“slow to speak, quick to listen” James 1:19

- Not having the last word
- Not giving my opinion unless asked
- Silencing the mind when others talk
- Not interrupting
- Listening when witnessing

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## Results Of Connecting With God Through Solitude:

- you can hear God better;
- experience the companionship of God;
- can dismiss committee members better and focus on God;
- be freed from self-obsession;
- be freed from busyness.

Solitude facilitates transformation from within. God speaks to you about how to love people around you and how to take your sabbath.

You don't have to work to balance your life.

Creative ideas come to you that would have eluded you in your hurry.

You minister authentically: drivenness gives way to peacefulness; planning becomes about prayer.

## Processing Questions

1. What feeling is behind the hurry in your life? Why *must* you hurry?
2. What benefit of solitude and silence would be most helpful to you?
  - quiet the cravings in life
  - feel at peace
  - can hear God better
  - other:
3. Think about your solitude and silence experience. Why do you think Jesus did this so much?
4. If you were to plan a personal retreat day or morning, what would be important to build into it?  
Location? A place to nap? A place to walk?

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## EXPERIMENTS IN SILENCE & SOLITUDE

Don't try too hard; just be.

Aim to *do nothing*. Be aware of God's gentle presence and open to anything God might say to you. Walk slowly or lay in the grass. Sit and stare. Just enjoy God. If a song comes to you, hum it (almost silently). If you're in a private place, dance to that song.

### HELPFUL IDEAS

- Ponder scriptural images, such as:

Zephaniah 3:17:

The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

John 15:4: Abide in me, and I in you. He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

Ponder a word or phrase of Scripture such as: love, God, peace; Be still, and know that I am God  
Ps 46:10

- Ask God these questions--gently:  
What kinds of things have you been saying to me recently? What themes have I heard?  
What would it look like to:  
    worship God with all my heart?  
    obey the voice of the Holy Spirit today?  
    speak the truth in love today?  
    love my enemy (any annoying person) today?  
    love my spouse today?
- Journal about whatever comes to you.
- Pray Scripture, such as Ephesians 3:14-20; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.
- Pray phrases from a song or hymn.
- Pray a psalm. Psalm 63 is about longing for God.
- Pray: Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.
- Rail through a psalm – try 69, 77 or 109.
- Write a prayer conversation.
- Try crabgrass contemplation: walk very slowly; notice everything in front of you; use all five senses to experience the world around you--lay down and smell the grass or put your cheek next to the bark of a tree.

“Sometimes I just sits and thinks. Sometimes I just sits.”

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## Praying Others' Prayers

My God, since You are with me, and since it is Your will that I should apply my mind to these outward things, I pray that You will give me the grace to remain with You and keep company with You. But so that my work may be better, Lord, work with me; receive my work and possess all my affections.<sup>1</sup> -- Brother Lawrence, before he did anything

Holy Spirit, think through me till your ideas are my ideas.<sup>2</sup> – *Amy Carmichael*

Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your children, and whilst teaching them, minister unto you. Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you, and say: "Jesus, my student, how sweet it is to serve you." Lord, give me this seeing faith, then my work will never be monotonous. I will ever find joy in humouring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all children.

O beloved children, how doubly dear you are to me, when you personify Christ; and what a privilege is mine to be allowed to tend you.

Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience. And O God, while you are Jesus my student, deign also to be to me a patient Jesus, bearing with my faults, looking only to my intentions, which is to love and serve you in the person of each one of your children. Lord, increase my faith, bless my efforts and work, now and for evermore, Amen.

-- Mother Teresa, the prayers of the workers in the Calcutta orphanage

Why, O Lord is it so hard for me to keep my heart directed toward you? Why do the many little things I want to do, and the many people I know, keep crowding into my mind, even during the hours I am totally free to be with you and you alone? Why does my mind wander off in so many directions, and why does my heart desire the things that lead me astray? Are you not enough for me? Do I keep doubting your love and care, your mercy and grace? Do I keep wondering, in the center of my being, whether you will give me all I need if I just keep my eyes on you?

Please accept my distractions, my fatigue, my irritations, and my faithless wanderings. You know me more deeply and fully than I know myself. You love me with a greater love than I can love myself. You even offer me more than I can desire. Look at me, see me in all my misery and inner confusion, and let me sense your presence in the midst of my turmoil. All I can do is show myself to you. Yet, I am afraid to do so. I am afraid that you will reject me. But I know -- with the knowledge of faith -- you desire to give me your love. The only thing you ask of me is not to hide from you, not to run away in despair, not to act as if you were a relentless despot.

Take my tired body, my confused mind, and my restless soul into your arms and give me rest, simple quiet rest. Do I ask too much too soon? I should not worry about that. You will let me know. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Amen."

-- Henri Nouwen

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<sup>1</sup>Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Robert J. Edmonson, trans. (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 1985), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Veronica Zundel, ed. *Eerdman's Book of Famous Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983, but out of print), p. 69 (Amy Carmichael), p. 99 (Mother Teresa), p. 106 (Nouwen).

# Intercessory Prayer as a Soul-Forming Practice

Jan Johnson

[www.janjohnson.org](http://www.janjohnson.org)

## How We Get Intercessory Prayer Wrong

Trying to “patch up” people and control them

Praying in a mechanical way instead of in relationship with God

## Intercessory Prayer Is About Formation Of Our Soul

Part of process of abiding in Christ (John 15).

Most frequently quoted verses about asking (John 15:7,16; 16:24) are all said in context of abiding. Abiding keeps you in conversation with God, reframes “unanswered” prayers.

Without abiding, you have a mechanical view of God. Prayer is a matter of manipulating God and using God. In relational view of God, you ask in Jesus’ name, conscious that you belong to Jesus, that you ask for God’s glory (rather than . . .)

Forms our soul by training us to: love; view others in light of God’s desire to transform them; think as God thinks (have mind of Christ), live in the kingdom of God; have faith.

CONSIDER: “We live in a Trinitarian universe, one where infinite energy of a personal nature is the ultimate reality. When we pray we enter the real world, the substance of the kingdom”—Dallas Willard

“Prayer is, above all, a means of forming character. It combines freedom and power with service and love. What God gets out of our lives—and, indeed, what we get out of our lives—is simply the person we become. It is God’s intention that we should grow in to the kind of person he could empower to do what we want to do. Then we are ready to ‘reign for every and ever’ (Rev. 22:5)”—Dallas Willard

## What If I Don’t Know What to Pray?

Ask God what to pray; make it part of the conversation with God. Fall back on biblical prayers:

- that they may all be one (John 17:21)
- Christ in them and they in Christ (John 17:23)
- that they may become completely one (John 17:23)
- strengthened in their inner being with power through Christ’s Spirit (Ephesians 3:16)
- to be rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17)
- to know (interactively) the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:19)
- love may overflow more and more in them with knowledge and full insight, to help them determine what is best (Philippians. 1:9, 10)

## Asking with Love for What Is Best (versus being co-dependent)

What did Jesus pray for Peter in Peter’s hour of need? "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me." (Luke 22:31-34)

## PRAY BROADLY

World situations: Iraqis dying and Gospel not being heard there; Sudanese being terrorized; every 14 seconds a child in Africa becomes an orphan (AIDS).

Culture: need for love of God, need for realness of God to appear in art and literature, need for science and practitioners of science (including medical professionals) to recognize that all science is God's science, that they work for God. Pray for educators to be creative and relational in teaching morality.

COMBINE with other types of prayer: praying Scripture, listening prayer, practicing the presence of God.

As always, pray as you can, not as you can't. Don't pretend. Be authentic.

SOLITUDE TIME: Experiments for you to consider . . .

Read John 17 and make a list of what Jesus prayed for his disciples. Intercede for someone you know, praying for these things.

Sit with a photo of someone you know (or an object that represents this person) in front of you. Pray, asking God to show you how to intercede for him or her.

Intercede in prayer for someone you love, praying that their faith will not fail. Tell that person what you prayed.

Think of someone in desperate circumstances whom you'd like to fix or rescue. Pray instead that they will grow in oneness with God (John 17:21).

Think of a topic about which you want to have the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). Ask God to show you what that might be. Then take a short walk. What comes to you?

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Matt 21:22. Think of a request you have made of God. Can you picture it? For example:

Picture good things flowing from person you dislike

Picture yourself being grateful not resentful

Picture your body healed—better than before

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What do you need to do or change in your asking prayers?

How might you pray with love (pray for what is BEST) for:

a certain enemy (someone you find difficult);

a family member you're concerned about

How might you pray more broadly? (e.g. world situations, culture)



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# Ignatian-Style Meditation

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## WHY MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE?

Meditation helps us to become "careful to do everything written in the Word" (Joshua 1:8).

It is mentioned more than 15 times in Psalms.

It is a spiritual discipline, which is practicing how to become attentive to that small voice & willing to respond when we hear it.

By picturing Scripture, your inner being is changed and you become “accidentally obedient” -- speaking and behaving the way Jesus spoke and behaved.

How is *meditation* on Scripture different from *study* of Scripture?

IN THE "STUDY" METHOD, YOU . . .	IN THE MEDITATION METHOD, YOU . . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dissect the text</li><li>• ask questions about the text</li><li>• read and compare facts and new ways of applying facts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the text and enter into it</li><li>• let the text ask questions of you</li><li>• read to let God speak to you (in light of facts already absorbed)</li></ul>

## IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Catholic reformer, itinerant teacher and preacher, spiritual director (1491-1556)

Spiritual Exercises grew out of experiences with God during months spent in a cave.

## HOW DO WE MEDITATE?

- If you had been present, what sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and textures would you have experienced? Let Jesus look you in the eyes, sitting face to face, and speak to you as he did the person in the passage. (“movie method” using the imagination)
- Read it aloud and let the word or phrase that *God* chooses resonate with you. Let go of your own agenda. (*lectio divina*: read, meditate, pray, contemplate; or modern words: read, reflect, respond, rest)

Read	Read passage aloud twice
Meditate (reflect)	Become one of the characters; see what word stands out to you. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is this passage saying to you today?</li><li>• What is God inviting you to do or be?</li></ul>
Pray (respond)	What does the encounter with this passage make you want to pray?
Contemplate (rest)	Rest in the truth of the passage; worship—fix the eye of the soul on God.

For more information, see <https://janjohnson.org/meditating-on-scripture/>

For some guided meditations, see <https://janjohnson.org/scripture-meditation-exercises/>  
(Those with \*\* are Ignatian; those without are *lectio divina* only.)

Letting God Speak to You Today through Scriptural Narratives

# What Happens When We're Wrong? When We Don't Get It Right?

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Jesus and Peter Walking on Water  
Mark 6:47-48; Matthew 14:25-33

## SCENE 1: JESUS SEES THEIR STRUGGLE (Mark 6)

47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. (Mark 6)

## SCENE 2: JESUS ARRIVES (Matthew 14)

25 During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

## SCENE 3: PETER STEPS OUT

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." 29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

## SCENE 4: THEY GET BACK IN THE BOAT

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33 Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

"Take time each day, before you read, while you read, and after you read, to **put yourself into living contact with the living Jesus.**" --Andrew Murray

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