

bullseye

Aiming
to
Follow
Jesus



Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson

Praise for...

bullseye

Aiming to Follow Jesus

Debbie and Jamie hit the target with their new work. They share their pastoral treasure with the wider church in a work that is a must-read for church leaders today. Moving beyond simple tips and tricks, this book zeroes in on “testimony” and the joy that discipleship to Christ brings humankind.

—Ross Lockhart is Associate Professor at St. Andrew's Hall, Vancouver.

This book offers a user-friendly resource with tried and true practices that foster discipleship. It offers a variety of ways of engaging each of the six markers, grounded theologically and in practice. I could easily recommend this to any one of the congregations I have the privilege of working with.

—Jackie Harper is the Conference Minister: Youth and Programs for Bay of Quinte Conference.

The best part is the list of practical tips at the end of each chapter. Good, solid suggestions. If you put just one tip into practice, you'll start breathing new life into your church, your ministry, your soul.

—Paul Ivany is the lead minister in a team setting at Norval United Church, Ontario.

Bullseye offers church leaders and participants a practical, grace-filled path to follow Jesus. “RELAX” appears early in the book to set the tone for a conversational, story-rich, illustration-packed exploration of the Spirit's practices for the church. It offers important concrete advice for a lively church.

—Norm Greene is Minister for Mission in South West Presbytery of the United Church.

Jamie and Debbie have created something precious and needed. God is indeed doing a new thing! In such a time of change what could be more important than going deep in our faith? If you want to get focused and effective in congregational leadership, this is a resource for you.

—Rob Dalgleish is the founding Executive Director of EDGE: A Network for Ministry Development, a United Church initiative.

Also available

Practical Ideas for Individuals and Groups.

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There is a beauty in the simplicity of discipleship; aim for Jesus and start moving. Simple doesn't mean shallow. Quite the opposite. Discipleship *Bullseye*-style equips everyday believers to live lives of profound faith and service. Jamie and Debbie clear away complicating distractions and trivialities to offer a way of practical discipleship accessible to everyone.

—Blair D. Bertrand is the minister at Calvin Presbyterian Church, Abbotsford, B.C., and is the Canadian partner for Ministry Architects.

Bullseye is a wonderful teaching tool whose emphasis is to help people become disciples of Jesus. As a layperson involved with a congregation, I can see the possibilities of using this user-friendly book at council meetings, for welcoming newcomers, in small group ministry, etc. The exciting part is that everything is provided, from a step-by-step outline to scripture passages, to testimonials.

—Pat Gilmore is the United Church's Book Display Coordinator.

This is a real church book. It's about partners, not members. It's about blessing, not attracting. It's about getting somewhere, not about having a good time on the way to nowhere. There are many disgruntled Christians critiquing Jesus (even in pulpits and pews). This is a book for clergy and laity who just want to follow Jesus.

—Tom Bandy is a church consultant and the author of more than 20 books on congregational mission, spirituality, and leadership.

How encouraging it is to have a resource that connects dots. Forming disciples is the purpose. The connecting dots are the paths of six markers. Any individual or congregation would be enriched by delving into the integrated nature of practice and doing explored in this book.

—Judith Johnson has spent years working with organizations and congregations to develop vision-driven ministry and programming.

Bullseye: Aiming to Follow Jesus
Jamie Holtom and Debbie Johnson



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Contents

Introduction	1
What Is This Book About?.....	2
Why This Book?.....	3
What Can You Expect?.....	7
Who Are We?.....	8
Ways to Use This Book.....	10
1 Using Spiritual Practices	12
Introduction.....	12
What Does Scripture Say?.....	18
The Spiritual Practice of Prayer.....	21
Why Is This Important?.....	23
Barriers or Challenges.....	27
Where Do I Start?.....	29
Practical Tips.....	31
Closing.....	36
2 Worshipping Together Weekly	37
Introduction.....	37
What Does Scripture Say?.....	40
Why Is This Important?.....	45
Barriers or Challenges.....	49
Powerful Experiences of God.....	51
Practical Tips.....	53
Closing.....	58
3 Discovering Authentic Community	59
Introduction.....	59
What Does Scripture Say?.....	62
Why Is This Important?.....	64
Barriers or Challenges.....	69
Practical Tips.....	75
Closing.....	79
4 Serving	81
Introduction.....	81
What Does Scripture Say?.....	82
Why Is This Important?.....	86
Barriers or Challenges.....	90
Practical Tips.....	96
Closing.....	101

5	Giving Generously	103
	Introduction	103
	What Does Scripture Say?	106
	Why Is This Important?	112
	Barriers or Challenges	117
	Practical Tips	123
	Closing	125
6	Sharing Christ	126
	Introduction	126
	What Does Scripture Say?	128
	Why Is This Important?	131
	Barriers or Challenges	134
	Practical Tips	141
	Closing	147
7.	Leading Your Church to the Bullseye	151
	Introduction	151
	What Does Scripture Say?	154
	Let's Get Started	157
	Barriers or Challenges	161
	Practical Tips	163
	Closing	165
8.	Integrating Bullseye into Your Congregation's Life	166
	Introduction	166
	What Does Scripture Say?	168
	Four Areas to Integrate	171
	Barriers or Challenges	177
	Practical Tips	178
	Closing	180
9.	Measuring the Impact	181
	Introduction	181
	What Does Scripture Say?	183
	Barriers or Challenges	186
	The Bullseye Survey	191
	Practical Tips	197
	Closing	198
10.	What Now?	200
	Introduction	200
	What Does Scripture Say?	201
	In Fact, It <i>Is</i> about You	203
	It's Simply about Falling in Love	204
	Closing	206



Introduction

Can you imagine a church that is alive with people who **pray every day**?

Can you imagine all kinds of people coming to church on a Sunday morning so **excited to worship** God that you can just feel the energy rise as they enter?

Can you imagine a church where people love one another and **share their lives together** in real and authentic ways?

Can you imagine a church where people **love to serve** and are growing in their relationships with Jesus as they use the gifts God has given them?

Can you imagine a church filled with people who so love to **give generously** that the offering plates overflow each week?

Can you imagine a church where people are so in awe of God and what God is doing in their own lives that they can't help but **share their faith** and invite their friends?

Can you imagine a church like this?

We hope you can. And we hope that in reading this book and applying the ideas and actions it suggests, you will experience these scenarios.

What Is This Book About?

This book is about forming disciples. At the end of the day, isn't that our main job as church leaders? To help people learn what it means to follow Jesus and take steps forward in living this way of life?

We know this isn't an easy task, and we would never pretend that we have it perfected. But we do believe that being intentional about following Jesus ourselves and helping others do the same is worth everything we've got.

If that is something that excites you, then this is the right book for you.

We have been invited into one of the most life-changing adventures imaginable. We get to join God in bringing about transformation in others' lives—along the way, guess what? We'll be changed too!

North Bramalea United Church (NBUC)

The context we write from is North Bramalea United Church, where we minister. We are a United Church in Brampton, Ontario. We started gathering in a high school building in 1983, and four years later our current building was built. In 2009 we added an extension to that original building, which increased our capacity for ministry.

However, what makes our church special really isn't anything to do with the building. What makes our church special is the presence of God that is so alive and well. People say that when they walk through the doors, they can feel something special, something different, something good. We believe that whether they know it or not, they are naming the presence of God.

We also have some pretty incredible people. We may be a little biased, but really, we do! There are kids and youth and parents and grandparents who just love to be part of what God is doing in this world. There is a love of Jesus that makes us want to be more like him, and a growing realization that when his Spirit lives in us, life is...well, it's just a whole lot better!

Now don't get us wrong. We have lots of challenges. Sometimes people rub each other the wrong way. Sometimes we don't have enough people to get everything done. Sometimes we get a little too busy. Sometimes we make

wrong decisions. Sometimes the music is too loud. Sometimes the sermon is too long. Sometimes we miss some details.

But that's okay. God never expected us to be perfect, and we try to keep the bar from getting higher than God would set it. And the truth is, you don't have to be perfect to join this great adventure of making disciples and forming people who are growing as followers of Jesus.

But you do need to be intentional.

And we believe this book will help with that.

Why This Book?

When we lead a church there are many demands on our time and our leadership. There is a never-ending list of people and tasks pulling us in all different directions. No matter what size a church is, one of the biggest challenges we face is focus.

What are we about? What is our purpose? What is the most important thing we should be doing?

Long ago at NBUC we came to the belief that our “main thing” should be growing disciples. We came to believe that Jesus' invitation to follow him and to live a way of life that reflected this choice was still the most important thing we could do.

So then the question became: What does that look like?

We are blessed to have a team who pulls our Sunday worship together. This team worked for the better part of six months on discerning what following Jesus might look like. We read books, including the Bible, of course! We studied people we knew who seemed to have Christ at the centre of their lives. It stretched us and grew us—at least on the inside—even before we were able to formulate an answer to the question, “What does that look like?”

Over time God blessed us with the idea of a Bullseye. A Bullseye simply offers a target to aim for. And that was really what we were trying to do. We were trying to help people who were aiming to follow Jesus to know

what the target was, to have something to shoot for if they wanted to take steps toward the kind of abundant life Jesus said he came to give (John 10:10).

It's important for people to know where the target is, don't you think? Remember that game pin the tail on the donkey? What was the very first thing an adult would do once the kid had the tail in their hand and was blindfolded? Point them in the right direction. The kid wouldn't have had a chance unless someone did that.

This was what we were trying to do. We wanted to be able to point people in the right direction if they decided to follow Jesus. When they asked for advice about the next step they could take, we wanted to have a response that would include specific things to do. We knew that we could say with certainty, "If you aim at these targets, you will be taking steps in the right direction and, even more than that, creating space for God to work in your life and, the life of your congregation." For clarity and simplicity, we thought it would be best to identify a small number of specific targets or markers.

The Six Markers

- ⊙ Using Spiritual Practices
- ⊙ Worshipping Together Weekly
- ⊙ Discovering Authentic Community
- ⊙ Serving
- ⊙ Giving Generously
- ⊙ Sharing Christ

Throughout this book, we will share each of these in more detail. And let us state right here that we are not saying these are the only things that make up a life of discipleship. These are simply the things that God led *us* to say are the most important in *our* church. If this list helps you, feel free to use it, and if it doesn't, feel free to add to it or adjust it as God leads you in your context. The main thing is having a target!

Living into Discipleship

In this Introduction, we will explain how best to read and use this book. But before we do that, it might be helpful to think about the word “discipleship” and what it means.

In our church context, the definition of “disciple” usually references the 12 who were close to Jesus or the 70 who were sent out in his name, and then broadens to include anyone who is a student or a follower of another—and in our case, the one we follow is, of course, Jesus. Perhaps because there has been a strong emphasis on the disciples of the biblical story, we have sometimes been reluctant to call ourselves disciples. It seemed a little pretentious or perhaps required a commitment we weren’t sure we were capable of making. So the terms “follower of Jesus” or “Christ-followers” or simply “Christian” became the ways that we referred to ourselves. I often hear people who follow Jesus refer to their denominational affiliation: “I’m United [or Baptist or Lutheran or Catholic].” As denominational strength has waned, people now are more likely to simply name where they go to church as a descriptor of who they are.

So the time is ripe to reclaim the words “disciple” and “discipleship.” It is who we are called to be and the path we are called to walk. Leaders in churches need to make the commitment to being disciples and to helping the people we serve grow into disciples as well. Being a disciple and discipleship are identities we grow into and deepen over time. A disciple refers to a person who has been changed by the awareness of the loving presence and power of Jesus Christ at work in their lives, and that experience leads to living life in ways that reflect God’s love and grace in all its forms. We may work at different occupations, even vocations, but the first call made on our lives, once we have decided to follow Jesus, is to live in a way that reflects what Jesus taught and demonstrated about God and God’s purposes for creation.

For church leaders who are reading this book—is there anything more important than growing as a disciple of Jesus yourself or helping the people in your community to do the same? We don’t think so. Yes, there is a lot of work in the church, more than we can ever get to, but at the forefront has to be our own commitment to growing as disciples and helping others to do the same. For when that commitment happens, lives are truly changed,

and that leads to changed families, communities, countries, and the world. The simplicity of Acts 2:42–47 belies the dedication, commitment, and perseverance of those first followers to overcome obstacles that most of us in Canada don't ever have to face. As we make the same kind of commitment they did, we also discover God's grace acting to give us the will and desire to become disciples of Christ Jesus.

The Bullseye—aiming to follow Jesus—has given us a reference point that shapes our journey of becoming disciples. God is at the centre of it all—inviting us into a way of living and being that transforms us. We have no expectation or even desire for perfection, but each step along the journey, each commitment to grow as followers of Jesus—as disciples—increases our gratitude for who God is and what God does. That gratitude spills over into every aspect of our lives—in our homes, at school, in our workplaces—everywhere we are.

Imagine for a moment what it took for those first communities of everyday, ordinary people who were learning what it meant to live as disciples of Jesus. Slaves and free, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, learning, teaching, practising, making mistakes, trying again, being encouraged and supported by others in the community. Each one who stayed with those communities discovered the freedom and purposeful living that being a disciple of Christ Jesus leads to (Galatians 3:28). Those everyday, ordinary people who made the commitment to becoming disciples of Jesus changed the fabric of their society and of the world. The Spirit of Christ dwelling in and moving through them empowered that change.

Does that seem too lofty? We have seen it happen in our own time. We have seen how a dad who hears a message in James 3:8 learns to pause and count to three or five or 10 before speaking and is therefore able to respond without anger and sarcasm to his son's rambunctious play. A teenager whose dad is living with terminal cancer turns to her small group and discovers the power of prayer, compassion, and loving community to sustain her and her family in life, in death, and in life beyond death. A widow, hearing of the death of another woman's husband, reaches out to the newly widowed to offer her own experience and willingness to walk beside this woman in her grief. A young man comes to church for the first time, struggling with his sexuality and wondering if the church will be a place where he will be shunned or excluded from God's love, and finds instead a compassionate

community of people who understand difference and difficulty and are learning to rely on God's grace for everything in their lives.

Disciples of Jesus form those communities, and as our lives are changed by Jesus, so are all our interactions. Can you imagine what God can build in and through us as we decide to grow as disciples of Jesus?

We can!

What Can You Expect?

The first six chapters will explore the six markers we believe are central to living life as followers of Jesus. Each of those chapters will include the following sections:

- ⊙ Introduction
- ⊙ What Does Scripture Say?
- ⊙ Why Is This Important?
- ⊙ Barriers or Challenges
- ⊙ Personal Stories
- ⊙ Practical Tips
- ⊙ Closing

The last four chapters are intended to help us deepen the practice of the six markers in the life of our church. We will look at the impact these markers may have on the leadership of your church as well as at how to implement the markers within various areas of the church.

As you'll hear repeatedly, no one is suggesting that anyone try to do all these things, especially not all at once. We do hope, though, that this book will be a helpful resource in taking even the smallest of steps toward a rejuvenation in our church and that God will bless both the reading of this book and the actions that are a result of the reading.

Who Are We?

Let us take a moment to introduce ourselves.



I am Jamie Holtom. I have been in ministry at NBUC for 16 years as an ordained minister. No one calls me “Reverend” except for a couple kids around our church. A few call me “Pastor” once in a while. Most people just call me “Jamie.” And I’m okay with that because that’s who I am.

I grew up hanging around ball fields and basketball courts more than churches. It wasn’t until later in life that I got connected to a community of faith. My first experience of Christian community was when my wife, Katrina, and I got involved with Kingsview United Church in Oshawa, Ontario. It was there that I became a student for ministry, and they supported me as a young man just getting his feet wet. Craig Donnelly and John Sullivan provided spiritual guidance and modelled a life in Christ that appealed to me.

Once I started at Emmanuel College, I was blessed enough to sit beside Phyllis Airhart, who happened to be a member at Royal York Road United Church in Toronto. Long story short, within a week of meeting her I was working at Royal York Road United as their Children’s Ministry Coordinator (and soon to be youth leader) with my first “job” in a church. Deborah Hart and David McKane were my “bosses” and helped me discover some leadership gifts that I didn’t even know I had.

My next “gig” would come as a student at NBUC. From my very first interview, this literally seemed like a match made in heaven! We were so aligned in our vision on what the church was called to be that I ended up coming back there as a full-time minister after I was ordained two years

later. I am so very grateful to my mentors and colleagues Norm and Bonnie Greene, who took me in as a student and taught me almost everything I know about church leadership and, even more important, about following Jesus. This book is about both, because when you stop to think about it, isn't that exactly what we're trying to do—create churches where people learn to follow Jesus?

I believe what you will read here has the potential to change you and your church. I say that because it is changing ours. If one idea from this book helps you do that or helps you lead someone in your congregation to do that, this whole project will have been worthwhile!

I am Debbie Johnson. I have been in ministry with NBUC since 2008 and am blessed to be part of such a vibrant community. Apparently I have a loud, identifiable laugh, because that's how many people seem to find me in the church!

When I was a child, my dad led us to St. James United Church in Montreal, and I bounced between there and my aunt's Catholic church. What I remember most from those years is that St. James had both a bowling alley in the basement and a woman minister—a deaconess—Lydia McCullough. At my aunt's church, I remember being fascinated by the rhythms and rituals, but my lasting memory was her putting her arm out in front of me every week when it came time for the eucharist: She was reminding me that I could not go up to receive communion (and neither could she since she was divorced). I didn't stay long enough in the church to be confirmed and only wandered back to church in my thirties, when my mom was diagnosed with cancer.

I was so very fortunate that my wandering led me to Eden United Church in Mississauga, Ontario. At that time, just like in the early days of NBUC, we were meeting in the local high school, as the new church building was under construction. My first time there, a woman came up to me after service and, noting that I was alone, invited me to sit with her the next time I attended. The next time I came was a communion Sunday. Alis Wertli was at a table at the entrance and she “made” everyone put on a name tag.

What happened later in that service changed my life. The minister, John Ambrose, extended an invitation that I realized included me: I went up to take communion for the very first time. John thoughtfully said my name as

he offered me the bread with these words, “Debbie, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life.” At that moment, I experienced the presence of what I now know is Christ’s Spirit, but at the time, it was such a profound sense of warmth and presence that I knew I was not alone, and so I began my walk with Jesus, which continues today. I never imagined I would be ordained, but the people of Eden saw something in me and continued to encourage me to grow as a follower and to take the leap of faith to be called into the order of ministry.

I have been blessed to have my husband, Wayne, by my side during this entire journey. We started going out when I was 16 and he was 22. We have grown up together, and I know that I could never do what I do, nor would I have had the courage to take that leap of faith in 1993, if Wayne hadn’t encouraged me to know that God, whom I loved and trusted completely, was with me every step of the way.

I cannot begin to name all the people and places that have influenced my development as a follower of Jesus. I hope you know who you are—faithful and encouraging friends, communities, and colleagues who are also growing and taking leaps of faith in a variety of contexts. For your companionship on my life’s journey I will be eternally grateful.

For you, the reader of this resource, thank you. Thank you for your desire to deepen your walk with Christ. Thank you for your willingness to dive deeper into what it means to say yes to Jesus and to follow where he leads, inviting others to do the same. I echo the hopes expressed by my colleague and friend Jamie—if as a result of this resource even one more life is changed by a new or renewed encounter with Jesus Christ, then we are grateful and blessed beyond our hopes and prayers.

Ways to Use This Book

There are many ways to use this book, and before we toss out a few ideas, here is the most important thing:

RELAX!

You see, many of us leaders may feel

- ⊙ that we're not doing enough, and there's already too much to do
- ⊙ the church is declining, so we aren't doing what we do well enough
- ⊙ that we aren't as good as that other leader or church, so why bother?

Ever feel that way? We'd be shocked if the answer wasn't yes because we all do! There is no one idea or gimmick that will make a church the best church ever. In fact, our job isn't to build "the best church ever." Our job is simply to follow Jesus and, as leaders, to keep building a community of people who are growing in their relationship with God.

So as you begin to use this book, we invite you to relax, enjoy reading, and listen for God's guidance in doing a few things that excite you from the ideas we'll suggest. Maybe earmark the pages that you connect with, and then share them over a coffee with a friend or colleague or your partner. Maybe don't try to do everything in this book. Maybe just do one thing. Maybe you will find one chapter or "target" that really resonates. Focus on that one. In fact, maybe share it with a few others. Put an idea on Facebook or tweet it. Maybe use this book with your board or council or a group of people you would love to spend some time with; you might discuss each chapter week by week.

You'll gather other ideas along the way, and we certainly will be trying to share practical, concrete approaches with you. But again, don't ever feel like you have to do it all—and certainly not all at once. We are all a work in progress as Paul describes in Philippians 3—not one of us has it all made, all figured out. We can make that into a source of angst, but the Bullseye was never meant to be anxiety-inducing. It's a marker, a path, a way to encourage our growth as disciples of Jesus. Just take one step, and let God light the path for the next step (Psalm 119:105). Think of the Bullseye as a to-be list rather than a to-do list, and discover what God will do in our lives and in the communities where we serve.

Questions for Reflection

- ⊙ How well has the church kept discipleship central to what we do?
- ⊙ How is the Philippians 3 passage helpful for you?
- ⊙ Have you started to get a sense of how this book might be a useful guide? In what ways?



Using Spiritual Practices



Introduction

In our Bullseye series the very first target is Using Spiritual Practices. “Spiritual practices” means those activities you can do in your day-to-day life to help you draw close to God. Traditionally this includes prayer, scripture reading, observing silence, and meditation.

Sometimes this list of activities gets stretched to include going for a walk in nature, listening to music, or serving others. Although these and many other similar activities can absolutely draw us closer to God, for the purposes of this chapter we will focus on traditional forms of spiritual practices.

Spiritual Practices

If you take the term “spiritual practices” literally, it simply means spending time with God through practising your spirituality. Of course, for followers of Jesus this isn’t just any type of spirituality but rather an intentional effort to let Christ’s Spirit live in us through these practices.

The beauty of the word “practices” is that just like anything else, these activities—praying and reading scripture—are ones we need to practise to become good at.

When I was young I played a lot of basketball. I would practise for hours on end. Over time I could shoot eight out of 10 free throws fairly consistently. But when I first started I would have been lucky to get two or three out of 10. It was only through consistently getting out there to practise shooting the ball that I got better.



Creating space
for God to work

The same is true for the Christian life in general and certainly with spiritual practices. At first it may actually feel kind of weird, or you may not experience anything profound at all. A time of prayer may simply be running through your grocery list or thinking about your favourite restaurant because you're hungry. But, over time, if you keep at it, you will start to experience something quite transformative as you feel God's presence close, as you feel the power of being so intimately connected with our Creator.

Have You Used Spiritual Practices?

We would suggest that in the life of a leader, focusing on spiritual practices is one of the single most important decisions you will make. To be a Christian leader and not be intentional around regular prayer and scripture reading would be like

- ⊙ a personal trainer who never works out
- ⊙ a golf pro who never swings a club
- ⊙ a piano instructor who doesn't know how to play the piano
- ⊙ a teacher who can't read



Later on in the chapter we'll talk about some of the barriers to spiritual practices. Undoubtedly one of the major barriers is the difficulty of finding or taking the time. (Check out the practical tips at the end of this chapter on how to use time in a way that allows you to increase the amount of prayer you do!) Whatever your situation, we challenge you—if you take away even just one thing from reading this book—to take a step in your own life with God through regular spiritual practices.

Now before we get too far into this chapter, we feel the need to be honest about our own reality and experience when it comes to spiritual practices.

Confession Time

Let's call this confession time! We both admit that we haven't always got spiritual practices right. Like many others, we have let things get in the way of making this our priority. There's a common assumption that because you work in a church you're automatically filled with the presence of God and

have the Spirit of Christ in you, but spiritual practices don't just happen; you have to be intentional.

Jamie's Confession

I know that my personality is to go hard and fast. I wake up ready to run and prefer to stay at that pace until I stop at night and fall into bed. My natural inclination is not to slow down and take time with God. My attitude has always been that God had better catch up to me. I remember trying to take retreat days and being really frustrated because I expected more. I expected that if I took a whole day with God, we would get big things accomplished. We would come back with a plan for the next 10 years. We would have figured out the solution to world hunger.

And then, after one of those days, I heard this whisper from God, asking me, "Why can't you just enjoy being with me?" And that changed not only my attitude to prayer, but also the way I prayed. Spending time with God was of immense value in and of itself.

I still certainly didn't become a prayer expert by any means. I would have a stretch where I would do okay. I might be fairly regular for a month or even two months, and then I'd get bored of that routine or my schedule would change for some reason and I would get out of the habit.

At that particular time a mentor of mine told me that if I got bored, it was okay, it was normal, and I wasn't a "bad Christian." He had a novel idea—simply that I try something different! This led to my experimentation phase of prayer and spiritual practices. I tried a variety of methods. For a while I prayed through the Psalms. Then I got into prayer walks, where I would walk and pray (eyes open!). I also had a phase where I prayed out loud.

And then one day I fell into my current routine, where I read some scripture and use journaling as a way to pray to God. Journaling became a way for me to spend quality time with God. It was active, which for me was really helpful. I could look back over weeks and months and even years to see the conversations God and I had been having, and I would be amazed to see how things had changed. I was also able to see patterns and significant observations that became a way for me to listen for God's direction and leading in my life.

The problem was, since I dated every journal entry, I could see exactly how regularly I had done spiritual practices each week. There was no lying or pretending. I noticed that I could go for a week or two at four to five entries per week, which was good. But then I could go for several weeks where maybe it was only two to three entries per week.

After being frustrated at that for quite some time, I finally decided that this was something I needed to improve in order to be the best leader I could possibly be. I was going through some challenges and realized that the title of Bill Hybels's book *Too Busy Not to Pray* was exactly right! I needed to spend regular time with God so I could be the person God intended me to be. It was simply a decision to be more disciplined. In my case that meant getting up earlier so I could practise before I left for the day. So far this is working, because these days I am generally achieving seven out of seven days! I do admit that many nights I fall asleep in one of the kids' beds or in front of the TV because I've been up so early—but overall it's worth it!

And if I'm really being honest, I have to admit that at first it felt like a duty, an obligation, something I just had to do. But, as my good friend Harold Percy suggests is the ultimate goal, these practices can change from a duty to a discipline to a delight.

And that is exactly what happened. Over time I got to a point where prayer and time with God were an absolute delight. These days I can't wait to get up, put the coffee on, open up my Bible, and spend some time with God, being completely open to whatever God might have in store for me that day.

Some say it is like running. Few runners enjoy running when they first begin. It's more often very hard and strenuous work. You may feel good when you're done, but generally not while you're doing it. If anything, it's usually, "How much longer do I have to go?" just like a kid on a long car ride. But then one day you realize that you're running and it's almost effortless. You've been running and actually enjoying it. And all of a sudden you start looking forward to your next run!

Debbie's Confession

I remember the energy of those first days in my walk with Jesus. When I woke up in the morning I wouldn't even get out of bed before checking in

with God. I didn't really know if that was praying or not, but I knew it was the way I needed to start my day.

So I would begin with, "Thank you for another day," and then I would offer up a laundry list of requests to God for that day. Not just for me—I knew enough to know that my prayers needed to include others too. While that may have been a very naive practice of prayer, it also taught me early on that there was nothing I couldn't bring to God in prayer. I ended our prayer time by saying the Lord's Prayer and then hopped out of bed and got on with the rest of the day. Sometimes there would be check-ins with God throughout the day—often sounding something like, "Oh God, help!" At the end of the day I said thank you as my head hit the pillow and I fell asleep.

I went to church and my new members' class and learned some things about the Bible and Jesus and prayer, but very little was spoken about spiritual practices. As I think back on it now, it probably was enough to first acquire the practice of "worshipping together weekly." I tend to be an all-or-nothing kind of person, so if I had been given a list of practices to engage in, I might have tried to do them all and, failing, which I no doubt would have done, I might have ended up thinking of the walk with Jesus as being filled with "should haves." This would have left me feeling guilty and unable to see the invitations as joyful.

As I mentioned earlier, my going to church coincided with my mother being diagnosed with cancer. After she'd had a few months of chemotherapy, the doctors believed that her cancer was gone and that she was in remission. One night I had a dream: I was with my mom, and she was talking about having come through her cancer journey. I kept staring at her in my dream because her nose was wrong. My mom had a very prominent nose, and the one on her face in my dream didn't look anything like it. I remember saying to her in my dream, "The only sign that you had cancer is that your nose has changed," and I woke up shortly afterward.

Now I'm not one of those people who remembers dreams very well, but that one stuck with me. That night I was in my final new members' class, and as I looked and listened to one of our leaders, I noticed his nose, and it hit me. It was the nose, that had been on my mother's face in my dream!

Do you know what it means to be gobsmacked? I was. I remember sitting back in awe as I stared at him and tears came silently down my cheeks. In that moment, I knew God had been listening to every single one of those prayers I had prayed—not because my mom was cured (she wasn't), but because the nose of the person who was teaching me how to become a follower of Jesus had shown up in a dream. For me it was as if God had spoken aloud: *Debbie, I am in this with you and your mom. Whatever happens we are going through this together!*

From those beginnings, it's taken many years and many attempts at different practices to find what consistently works for me:

- ⊙ I have to get out of bed first now, but then I immediately open the Bible app on my phone and read the verse of the day from YouVersion. I take the time to read the verse in the context of the whole chapter.
- ⊙ I have signed up for various reading plans to be delivered to my phone—I usually have two on the go. Right now I am reading through a chronological Bible and a devotional called *Simplify* by Bill Hybels.
- ⊙ I read the daily devotional or inspirational e-mails I have signed up for.
- ⊙ Then it's time for 20 minutes of centring prayer, which was taught to me by Sue Woollard, a member of NBUC. After getting comfortable and preparing for this time of listening for God, which often includes putting on my prayer shawl, I spend 20 minutes repeating my mantra “Breath of God,” coming back to it when my mind wanders.
- ⊙ When I finish that prayer time I offer one last prayer for the day—my intention to walk closely with Jesus and to listen and act on his leading throughout my day.
- ⊙ I meet once a month or every six weeks with a spiritual director. I've been doing that for 18 years; it helps to hold me accountable and encourage my own walk with God.
- ⊙ I set aside a couple of days to a week every year for a silent retreat.
- ⊙ I intermittently practise Sabbath time. After my husband, Wayne, and I realized how many of our “date nights” had been lost, we decided to try practising the time we had set aside as date night as “Sabbath time” instead. I was shocked at the difference that “living Sabbath” had on our relationship. There was a peace, calm, and delight that permeated our time together. Whether you set aside a few hours or a whole day, the practice of Sabbath time will change your soul's perspective.

There are times when my centring prayer time lasts only 10 minutes or when I skip some of my reading. And there have been times when I find myself out of balance; then I realize that the first thing I let go of was my daily spiritual practices, and only when I return to them does balance start to be restored.

I recently read that despite the common understanding that it takes 21 days to make a new practice into a habit, it's apparently more like three times 21 days! So if you are engaging in a new spiritual practice, give it a chance to "take." It may not be the right one for you—and if you know that instantly, then change it out instantly—but in general, don't stop working on a new practice until you've really given it time to take.

It's easier to keep up our good intentions if we share them with a buddy who will not beat us up when we fail (and we will) but will encourage us and hold us responsible for what we say we want to do. I recently told Jamie that I wanted to get back into journaling, which I have done sporadically over the years. I know never to mention something to him that I don't really want to try to do! So now that the cat is out of the bag on this one, I know I will be asked about how I am putting my journaling intention into practice and encouraged to keep at it.

What Does Scripture Say?

We love the vision of Romans 12:1–2 and the work of God in us that it offers through spiritual practices. Check out the way Eugene Peterson translates it:

Romans 12:1–2 *(The Message)*

“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity,

God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

When we become intentional around spiritual practices we’re simply bringing our life before God and opening ourselves up to all the beautiful things that Paul describes in this passage. It is the process of transformation that is part of the Christian life and that Jesus invites us into every single day.

Personal Story

Spending time with God in silent meditation has been a priority in my life for 40 years—the last 10 years through centring prayer, a simple but powerful Christian meditation. The word “discipline” means “doing in love.” My daily discipline is to centre (meditate) twice a day for 20 minutes using the name of Jesus as my sacred word. I follow with scripture and personal prayer. This twice-daily discipline has grown in me an inner calmness and peace. That calmness and certainty of God’s love has given me the courage to discern and do things I have never done before, using my skills to be the hands and feet of Jesus in my church and mostly outside in the community.

Another wonderful layer of depth was added when I walked the 800-kilometre pilgrimage route of the Camino de Santiago (Way of St. James) in Spain in 2011 after I retired. So much good has come from it that I walked it a second time in October 2014. But the ultimate privilege over the past year and a half has been teaching centring prayer to people in my church.

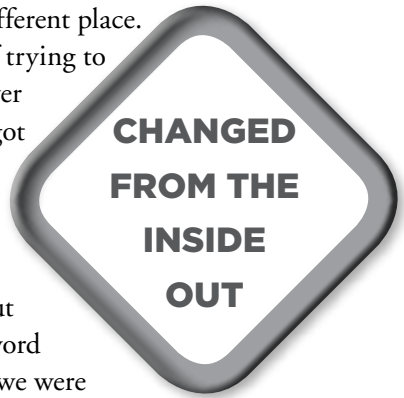
I feel that through the *internal* journey of centring prayer, the fruits of the Spirit continue to manifest in my life in very practical ways because that’s the kind of person I am—practical. But it has not, in any way, diminished my *external* enthusiasm for life. I feel that I am, like everyone else, a work in progress, and I can’t wait to see what exciting new things God has in store for me in the years to come. It’s such an adventure! —Sue Woollard

It's not something that is reserved for only certain people. You do not need to be a biblical scholar or have your Master of Divinity to bring your "sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around-life" and place it before God. You don't need to have grown up in the church. There really are no prerequisites to experiencing this way of life. It is simply bringing your lives before God.

Spiritual practices like prayer and regular reading of scripture help us fix our attention on God, as this passage from Romans suggests. Fixing our attention on God, making God the focus of our lives, has powerful effects.

Many people think of prayer as trying to get God to perform some kind of magic and knock items off our wish list of needs or wants. However "fixing our attention on God" takes us to a much different place.

We begin to see things differently. Instead of trying to get God on board with our agenda we discover that maybe life would work out better if we got on board with God's agenda. When that happens we get changed from the inside out.



The word that often gets used for this spiritual process of change from the inside out is "transformation." It comes from the root word "morph," which means to become more like we were meant to be.

Doesn't this make sense? That's part of what God does and part of what happens when we fix our attention on God. Ever have one of those days where you're impatient or just a little off? Maybe you find yourself snapping, or judging people more than you would like to, or becoming too easily frustrated—and you might say, "I'm just not myself today." The truth is, we're not always ourselves. We need to be changed from the inside out, and that is the work that Paul is suggesting God can do.

Romans 12:2

"Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."

Sometimes this renewing might mean a change of attitude toward someone we've been struggling with as God gets us out of our own stuff. Sometimes

it might result in an appreciation not only for the marvellous creation all around us, but also for the God who gives us this wonderful creation. Sometimes it could be getting a jolt of confidence as we recognize that God is able to do great things and that often happens through us. Sometimes it is simply spending some time with God in a way that brings a deep peace and assurance that all is well.

Spiritual practices are something *we do* because as we become followers of Jesus, we seek to live lives that *respond* to our experience of God's grace and love. Those practices shape who we are by leading to transformation of our actions so that they more fully reflect our relationship with God. That experience leads us into an even deeper desire to explore and engage in other practices that deepen this connection.

Fixing our attention on God through spiritual practices moves us in such ways that we are literally changed. Life is different, and we become more like Jesus—which, at the end of the day, is the target we are calling Bullseye and at which we are taking aim.

The Spiritual Practice of Prayer

Judy Reid is known by many who have been around NBUC for a while as “the Prayer Lady” because she is a woman who is immersed in her own prayer life and also never stops learning about, sharing, and teaching ways to practise prayer with others.

She has taught us to think about how we pray. Are you an in-depth-prayer kind of person or a prayer-on-the-run kind? That's a shorthand Judy uses to teach us the value of both. If we have a steady diet of fast food, it inevitably affects our overall health. So too with prayer. If we are always praying on the run, it's like going to the drive-through—putting in our order and expecting delivery by the time our car arrives at the cashier's window. Contrast that with in-depth prayer. That's more like a Sunday supper. There is time to plan the menu and prepare the food. Time to set the table and wait for guests to arrive. There is time to talk and to listen. Sunday suppers of old were times to connect with one another and to nourish body and soul.

Jesus did a lot of praying. In chapter 11 of Luke's gospel, one of his disciples, who would have known how to pray himself, noted that Jesus didn't just set aside time for prayer, his life seemed to be one constant prayer—of ongoing connection to God in all times and circumstances. He asks Jesus to teach his followers how to pray. Let's jump over to the Gospel of Matthew to get Jesus' fuller description. We're going to use *The Message* version here, but take a look at the NRSV as well. This comes from Jesus' address in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 6:5-15 (*The Message*)

“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense God's grace.

“The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right;
Do what's best—
 as above, so below.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.
You're in charge!
You can do anything you want!
You're ablaze in beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.

“In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can’t get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God’s part.”

Take a look at that last paragraph again: “In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do.”

That is why two of the spiritual practices we have named in the Bullseye are scripture reading and prayer. We want to grow as followers of Jesus—to learn more about how to live the life he has invited us into and to share that life with others. As mentioned earlier, if we want to become better at something, we need to practise it. What better way than prayer to deepen our connection to God and to help us learn to listen for God’s voice—those “God nudges” that come into our hearts and minds and dreams—and then to act on it?



Why Is This Important?

To Help Us Follow Jesus’ Example

Maybe we’re still wondering, why bother? What’s all the fuss about encouraging ourselves, as leaders, and the people we lead to be so intentional around spiritual practices? We have said it before and we will say it again—if we are seeking to grow as followers of Jesus, then it only makes sense to look at Jesus’ own life and learn from what he did. Here are some passages that demonstrate that.

Luke 4:16-19

Immediately after Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit leads him out into the desert for 40 days. We can only assume that while he was there, he prayed. He had been baptized and had experienced being called by name. He is led out to commune with God and discern what his ministry was to be about. He was tempted to take shortcuts, rely on something other than the power of God, and get the results without the effort. No matter that he was hungry and tired, he resisted all those temptations and came back with a clear vision of what his ministry among us was to be about.

Luke 5:16

It doesn't seem to matter what Jesus had been up to, he understood that he could only do it if he stayed connected to God. Sometimes that meant withdrawing from the crowds who came to him for healing, or glimpses of the "kingdom of heaven come on earth," or other signs and wonders. He always came back from these withdrawal times with more energy and purpose, empowered to continue his mission on earth.

Matthew 15:35–37a; John 11:39–41; Luke 22:14–20

There are more passages about Jesus praying, "thank you" than these ones, but take a look. At the feeding of the 4,000 (plus women and children), at Lazarus' tomb, and again at the Last Supper, Jesus says, "thank you" to God in his prayers. Notice he prays this thank you before anything has even happened. Jesus' own spiritual practice had him living with an attitude of gratitude for all God was doing—that which was seen and that which hadn't happened. His gratitude was an acknowledgement of his connection to God in all circumstances!

Some 1,200 to 1,300 years later, a mystic known as Meister Eckhart would teach: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough." Why bother? Because the spiritual practice of prayer left Jesus in a state of gratitude and with a sense of purpose and clarity about God's call on his life. Prayer gave him the connection to God that brought him the power and strength to persevere in all circumstances. Is it any wonder that followers of Jesus take aim at the Bullseye of Spiritual Practices through prayer as well?

Do Something

We often find people understand this part of the Christian life better when we compare it to going to a gym. Let's say you signed up at a local gym. You paid your annual membership fees, and you were very excited about your first session. What if when you showed up, this happened?

- ⊙ You sat around and watched the instructor work out.
- ⊙ You were given a handout on how to exercise.
- ⊙ Someone came and talked with you about what it is like to work out.



- ⊙ You watched a video of a whole group of people working out.
- ⊙ The leader or instructor then said thanks for coming and welcomed you back to do the same thing next week.

Can you imagine? What would you do? Wouldn't you demand your money back and say, "I signed up to actually work out"?

The Christian life was never meant to be a spectator sport. Jesus' invitation to follow him naturally leads to a way of life that involves us participating.

We Desire to Be with God

There is a beautiful hymn in *Voices United*, "As the Deer Pants for the Water," based on Psalm 42. Here are the first two verses of that psalm:

"As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God."

Do you remember when you were first courting? Do you remember the anticipation for that phone call (we may have lost something in our instant-messaging culture, but I think it's the same even with different media) and for the time when you would be together? Do you remember the first time you watched your beloved sleeping, smiling as you watched the rise and fall of breath, the way sleep took away all cares and worry lines from their face? Do you remember the excitement of waiting for a dear friend to call? Or when you were about to see your mom or dad after a long absence?

Is your desire to be connected and in deepened relationship with God akin to a deer panting for life-giving water? If it is, you already know that as we respond to our own desire for connection to God, we discover that God first desired to be connected to us.

Take a few moments to read the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). It's midday and the sun is hot and she has come to draw water from the well that sustains life. But Jesus offers her something even more powerful than water: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Is your soul longing and thirsting for deepened connection to God? Then take aim at the Spiritual Practices target on the Bullseye and watch what God will do.

It Deepens Our Appreciation of Life

Spending time with God through spiritual practices helps us become more appreciative as God makes us more aware of our life. Prayer often causes us to slow down and pay attention to our life. There is so much going on every day, so much information coming at us, that pressing the Pause button to reflect on life results in a deeper appreciation for life.

The other day I took some time while praying to pray through my family. It was remarkable how my appreciation for each of them deepened as I did this. Try it out!

As we bring our lives before God, even with the challenges and troubles we might face, there is gratitude for what we do have that is part of Christ's transforming work in us.

We Seek God's Direction

As a Christian leader, this one is as important as any we've named yet. Part of our work, our job, if you will, is to listen for God's leading and direction, not only for our own lives, but also for our congregation's life. This kind of intentional seeking of God's leading is very hard to do if we're not spending time with God. It is often in the midst of silence, prayer, and the reading of scripture that we get a sense of something God is prompting us to do, or prompting our church to do.

A little over a year ago, our congregation became involved in a neighbourhood of Brampton called Ardglen. This is an area that has had a tough time over the past few years. There was tragic loss of life when two young boys were killed—one in a drive-by shooting and the other in a terrible fire that left 18 families homeless. The mood in this community has been one of despair.

That's where God comes in. Through prayer and the reading of scripture, we believed God was inviting us to be involved in this area. We had read a passage of scripture that really grabbed our hearts: "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (John 1:14 [*The Message*]).

Personal Story

I started attending church at the age of 30. I picked up reading a daily devotional. I spent time in prayer and quiet time in the Lord's presence. These are practices I naturally gravitate toward. However, over the years I've felt nudged into areas beyond my comfort zone. I've come to realize that one of the greatest contributions to my spiritual growth came from companionship—either in a large congregation, a group of five, or just one friend. Something incredible happens when people come together and allow the spirit of Christ to move among them. It inspires, encourages, and, at times, challenges. More than that, there's the love, the support, and the prayers that somehow make the highs higher and the lows, well, more manageable. Seeing where God strengthened someone else helped me to see where he strengthened me. To see where he protected someone else, I see where he protected me. When I see where he loves, I saw where he loved me. That's better than reading scripture. It's living it!

In sharing experiences with others in an intimate setting, I've seen how God has moved in their lives. In seeing that, I can see how he's worked in my life too. I've been nurtured, encouraged, inspired, and challenged. But mostly, I've been loved.

—Todd Bourgeois

As we said this verse aloud, the “moved into the neighbourhood” part really caught us and became a guiding principle. It led us to move into the area and open up a neighbourhood centre called The Journey. As leaders, it was with God's confidence that we could say that we were doing this because it really was God's leading. And ultimately, this confidence and direction arrived through much time spent in prayer and a powerful scripture.



Barriers or Challenges

Okay, so if spiritual practices are so good and can bring about all of the above, then why don't we all do them regularly? Why are people in our churches not doing them? It's not that they (or we) are

bad people! It's not that people don't love God and their neighbours and *want* to deepen their relationship with Jesus. So why not, then?

Well, here are just a few reasons we have found that are very real for many people. These might be different for each of us, and this list isn't meant to make anyone feel guilty. This is not a list of excuses, but simply of some of the reasons or barriers that can get in our way. It's good to name them because as we do, we take one more step toward overcoming them.

I Have Other Priorities

We can find ourselves in different seasons of our lives where we may put other priorities ahead of spending time with God. This may be unavoidable or even necessary for a day, maybe two, but consistently putting other priorities first will weaken our connection to God, which is actually the one connection that will help with all the other priorities.

I Don't Have Enough Time

Sometimes the idea of beginning a spiritual practice leaves us wondering, "Where will I fit this in?" and we become so burdened by the thought of adding something else to our day that we just can't take the next step. Try to get around this by making it simple—tie your spiritual practice to something you already do regularly. Open the fridge door—say a prayer of thanksgiving. While working out at the gym—say a prayer or quote scripture. (I have found "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" [Philippians 4:13] very helpful.) As you draw closer to God you will find yourself more able to take 15 minutes with God a day; even if you only start with one day, you'll soon find you can move on to two and build from there.

I'm Not Mother Teresa

Many feel this way. I think, in fact, the church at one point discouraged regular people from reading scripture as a way of keeping control and power. That day is over, thank goodness!

I Already Go to Church on Sunday

Sometimes the bar needs to be raised. Can you imagine being in a relationship and only seeing the other person once a week?

I Don't Even Know Where to Start

Sometimes people just really don't know how to start praying or reading scripture. It's not that they don't want to; it's just that no one has stopped to show them how. I'm going to share a story here about this particular point. One day I was talking in my office with someone fairly new to our church. She came to see me because we had looked at the story of the Good Samaritan the Sunday before, and she was really moved to be a neighbour to someone who lived on her street. As we talked, she asked about prayer. She had a desire to pray but didn't know where to start. She hadn't grown up in a Christian home and had never really gone to church; now, as a young adult, this was all new to her. She loved what she was hearing and experiencing on Sunday mornings but literally had no idea how to bring it further into her life.

So I told her about a very simple formula for prayer we often use called TSP (thank you; sorry; please). That's it! Take some time with God and run through those three points, sharing with God what comes to your mind and heart. The formula gives just enough direction to provide a starting point and a way to stay focused. It's not meant to limit anyone, but to be a tool to help us converse with God.

She loved it! And so I said we could actually try it right away if she liked. She said, "Now?!" I assured that we could, and so we took five minutes to pray together right then and there. The best part of this was that not only had we talked about prayer and then practised it together, but we had also modelled for her how to pray, and she could now do this at home—which she did! She even shared it with her husband.

Where Do I Start?

Here are a few ideas on how to make reading the Bible easier and more rewarding:

- ⊙ Do you have a Bible? If not, or if the one you have is big and dusty and filled with records of family history, then get a more portable one.
- ⊙ There are free Bible apps available online that can be downloaded to your smart phone or computer and that give you access to multiple

translations and Bible-reading plans. Two free ones that we recommend are:

- the YouVersion Bible app (www.youversion.com)
- Bible Gateway (www.biblegateway.com)
- ⊙ Unless you are a seasoned scripture reader, we would not tell you to start at Genesis and work your way straight through to the end. Most people who try to read the Bible with that kind of plan, unless it's for an Old Testament course at theological school, will get bogged down in Leviticus and Numbers and may even stop reading, missing out on the power of scripture to speak to our current time and situations.
- ⊙ When we give Bibles away we include a card that suggests starting with Philippians. (It's short, it's filled with practical advice, and, okay, it's one of my favourite books of the Bible.) Then move on to the Gospel of Mark to get a glimpse of Jesus' life and teachings. Then we suggest trying Psalms or Proverbs, and after that we can suggest some further reading.
- ⊙ If someone is asking you where to start, you may want to share what you do. Debbie's routine is laid out earlier in this chapter. Jamie's routine is to, every morning, put the coffee on, have a moment of stillness, read scripture, journal (about the scripture and the previous day), and then end with a TSP (thank you; sorry; please) prayer—usually written down.
- ⊙ Know that there are a variety of ways to engage in spiritual practices, many more than we have noted here. An excellent online resource is www.practicingourfaith.org, which grew out of the book by the same name, by Dorothy C. Bass.

Here are a few other spiritual practices to deepen your connection to God:

- ⊙ Listen to Christian music in the car. We are fortunate to have Steve Allin, a musician, singer, and songwriter, in our congregation. He has recorded some of his music on CDs, including a Christmas CD that we played over and over in our cars this past December.
- ⊙ Experience the beauty of nature—take a nature walk, giving thanks to God for this beautiful earth.
- ⊙ Engage in regular service to others.
- ⊙ Pray with someone else.

One caution—whatever you choose as your spiritual practice, and there likely will be more than one, it is the intentional, regular practice of whatever you have chosen that will deepen your connection to God...and it is God's grace and love received through that practice that will change your life! But don't take our word for it—try it and see!



Practical Tips

Each chapter in this book will end with practical ideas or suggestions that you can use in your church to help take steps toward increasing your “aim” at that particular target and to grow together in following Jesus.

These ideas won't be in any particular order, but we'll provide 10 for each of the six Bullseye targets. And please, our intention is not for you to end up feeling stressed out by trying to do all of them. Simply choose one or two that best fit your situation and give them a shot. Then sit back and watch what God will do.

1. Use Spiritual Practices in Worship

The thing about this is that it doesn't even require any extra time. No one has to sign up for a course. It is simply taking advantage of the time you have when people are already there. This may be done by offering a period of silence in a worship service—after a song or even after the message. You might take 30 seconds to describe how to use silence, to give a few instructions on what might happen, and then to always add, “And this is something you can do at home.”

2. Give Away Free Bibles

A few years ago a member of our congregation gave a donation in memory of his wife, to be used for the purchase of Bibles to be given to families bringing children for baptism. That was an inspiration to us to continue the practice after the memorial donation gave out. We now give a book on spiritual parenting to the parents in our baptismal course, and we also give Bibles away to anyone who wants one. We have given away well over 300 Bibles in the past two years, and we believe strongly that this is having an impact on people who have come to NBUC hoping to learn how to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

3. Use Prayer Consistently in Meetings

This is an excellent opportunity to teach about spiritual practices and to increase the effectiveness of any meeting. It may mean opening and closing a meeting with prayer. (Check out a new book of meeting prayers by David Sparks coming from UCPH in fall of 2015!) It may mean praying with a couple after talking about their upcoming wedding. It may mean praying in the midst of a meeting when there is something to celebrate and praise God for or something that requires more discernment and God's leading. When you do all these things as you lead, you're modelling prayer and spiritual practices for others.

4. Fifteen Minutes with God a Day

During our last capital campaign, we began the Fifteen Minutes with God a Day challenge. We prepared and distributed a devotional that included a daily scripture and devotional reflection and some further questions, and invited people to pick up the devotional and spend approximately 15 minutes a day with God. Over 100 people signed up for that first challenge. Since then the group has grown to over 200 people who either use the devotionals we provide or some other resource. It's not about the number of people doing it, but we have found that our community always enjoys being challenged!

5. Offer a Course on Prayer

This perhaps more than any other thing can change the DNA of your church. Our experience with Judy Reid as the Prayer Lady taught us a valuable lesson. There is an expectation that clergy types know how to pray and likely have calluses on their knees from all the praying they do. For some people that becomes a built-in reason to exclude themselves from the practice of prayer. However, when a layperson was asked and encouraged to lead a prayer course, then the experience and expectation changed. It became, "Well, if she knows how to do it, maybe I can too." If you don't have such a prayer person yet, don't let that stop you from offering a course. Invite someone to co-lead with you. Develop your own resource or use one of the many that are available. (A really good one is Jane E. Vennard's book *A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice*.)

Personal Story

A spiritual practice that I try to follow is reading daily devotionals. I have a morning devotional book, *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence* by Sarah Young, that was given to me by a dear friend, Phil Ash, that I use to start my day. I also have an evening devotional book, *Ending Your Day Right* by Joyce Meyer, that I finish my day with. I find that doing morning and evening devotionals helps to keep me calm and gives me a sense of peace that I never used to have.

I also try to attend at least one or two spiritual development courses each year. These practices have helped me to grow, as well as given me a sense of peace. —*Alison McCulloch*

6. Good Old-Fashioned Scripture Memorization

Here is a traditional method that many have forgotten about. We have discovered that there is great power in memorizing scripture. It provides an anchor that keeps you focused on God by simply pulling material out of your memory bank. This can be a nice thing for a family to do together, maybe choosing a verse each month and challenging everyone to memorize it. The same thing can work for your children's or youth or men's or women's ministry. Regularly challenge people to memorize specific verses that speak to that group of people.

We have had many leaders at NBUC memorize Philippians 4:6–7 (“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”) and Matthew 11:28 (“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”) These become lifelines to God in the midst of stress and responsibility. James 1:19 is an appropriate one for couples to learn: “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” Our young people love Joshua 1:9: “Be strong and courageous, do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” This one step of encouraging your people (and doing it yourself) can dramatically impact your church!

7. Increase the Amount of Prayer around Your Church

By this point we are probably all agreed on the importance of prayer as a spiritual practice even if we still can't articulate everything there is to know about prayer. With that agreement in mind, increase the presence of prayer in your church community. You probably already have time in your meetings, either at the start or finish or both. Begin to encourage everyone by praying aloud as you end the meeting. Then invite others to do the same. There are a number of ways to help people overcome any hesitation around this, including giving them the option to pass with a simple "Amen" spoken aloud, which can be the cue for the next person to begin.

Many churches offer prayer during communion. We do too, having designated the back two corners of the church as prayer corners. We invited lay leaders with a gift for prayer to stand there, and then we explained what would happen next: People could go back to the corners, ask for a prayer, and the lay leaders would pray for them. The prayer corners were such a powerful visual about the power of prayer that we thought, why not do this every week? Now we do, and it would be a rare Sunday when no one took the time to ask for a prayer.

As leaders in the church, you know that people often come up to you on a Sunday morning seeking out time to talk to you about an issue in their hearts. When you have had one of these conversations, don't hesitate to take the time to pray. You don't have to scream the words, but when others see you with your hand upon someone's shoulder, the two of you huddled in prayer, it not only demonstrates your belief in the power of prayer as engagement with God, but it also lets everyone who sees you praying together know that prayer is a normal activity.

8. Make Use of Time Throughout the Day

One of the challenges for many leaders is that their schedule is so full one thing runs into another. Experiment with including prayer more throughout your day. You could end meetings 10 minutes early and take five of those minutes to pray or be with God. You might come in early so you can take time with God before you start into e-mail and responding to others' needs. Or perhaps you stay home and spend some time with God before you come to the church. Reserve time at set intervals, such as 10:00, noon, and 2:00, so that at those times you pause for 60 seconds to think about God and what God is doing that day. Pray before each phone

call you make or e-mail you send as a way of turning these into spiritual activities—you could pray for the person you're contacting or for what they are working on. Be creative, and enjoy finding ways to include God more in your day.

One of the practices I do is pray through a prayer list that I have set to pop up on my Outlook calendar every day at 11:00 a.m. It helps me to keep my intention and promise to pray for others and gives me time to connect with God and with those people whose names are on my list. And of course don't forget to share your success in this with others so they can try it too. That's what leaders do!

9. A Week of Guided Prayer

There is a network of helpful people in the Hamilton Conference of The United Church of Canada who create resources for a Week of Guided Prayer (www.weekofguidedprayer.ca). People commit to a week-long experience during which they will read and reflect on scripture and meet with a trained spiritual companion daily. There are a number of churches in the Greater Toronto Area that have tried this for one week a year. Maybe it's something that you would like to try.

10. Prayer Vigils

Twice a year we have a prayer vigil at the church. The practice of praying through the night has been common throughout the history of Christianity. People have gathered in the sanctuary during times of crisis. When we were preparing for the opening of our expanded facility, we offered prayer times that people could sign up for all that weekend. They could sit and pray or move around the sanctuary and offer a walking prayer at the font for people who would be baptized, at the table where communion would be shared, at each chair where someone might sit for the first time they would experience connection to God, at the windows that looked out on the world that God so loves, on the steps where children would gather to hear a story of God's love for them, and so much more.

A couple of years ago we offered a 24-hour prayer vigil and folks signed up to come in and pray at various times through the day and night. Since then we have offered the biannual prayer vigils from five p.m. to midnight. We bring in a labyrinth for those who want to experience walking prayer, and we provide all kinds of resources to assist people with their prayer

time. Some come and stay for 10 minutes and others for an hour and still others are present praying for the whole time. We've never heard anyone say, "Wow—what a waste of time," but we have heard everyone say, "Thank you."

Closing

The gospel is about an invitation. Jesus started his movement by inviting others to follow him. The Christian life starts the exact same way today—with an invitation from Jesus. It requires a response because it's about a way of life; it's not just an intellectual exercise or some helpful information or a set of rules. Spiritual practices will open us up to the help of the master teacher, of the creative sculptor, the One whose greatest desire is to live within us.

Whatever practice you choose to engage in consistently as part of hitting the Bullseye, you will be transformed by that practice into even deeper connection to Jesus Christ. Do whatever it takes to engage in a spiritual practice today, and then stay with it. Let your practice, your connection with Christ, so shape your life that it becomes as natural as your breathing, a desire that is as deep as that of a deer that pants for water!

Following Jesus: What does it look like?

Many people who come to church aren't sure. *Bullseye* maps out six markers—spiritual practices, worship, community, serving, giving, and sharing Christ—that are signs of a Christian life. It offers church leaders practical suggestions for helping members grow their faith and for living out the markers in your faith community.

This deceptively simple book is loaded with practical ideas for leaders who are seeking to nurture vital spirituality and ministry in their congregations. If you are such a leader, do yourself a favour and read this book.

—Harold Percy has been a priest in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto for the past 38 years.

This book offers tools for the challenge of shaping lives toward healthy, Christ-centred spirituality. If 1,000 churches began to live out the goals and practices of *Bullseye*, the spiritual landscape of our society would be transformed.

—Orville James serves at Wellington Square United Church, Burlington, Ontario.

Also
available

Practical Ideas for Individuals and Groups

This companion *Bullseye* booklet covers the six markers and offers simple support and encouragement for growing your faith individually or in a group.

Jamie Holtom has been a United Church minister for the last 16 years at one of the most vibrant United Churches in our country, North Bramalea United Church, Ontario (NBUC). He and his wife, Katrina, have also published a devotional book for parents called *The Gift of a Child*.

Debbie Johnson has been a United Church minister for the last 16 years. She is currently part of the ministry team at NBUC and previously served at Cawthra Park United Church, Mississauga, Ontario, and as Minister for Faith Formation and Leadership Development at Hamilton Conference.



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