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# **A Guide to Jesuit Leadership and Ignatian Spirituality**



EBOOK SAMPLER

# A Guide to Jesuit Leadership and Ignatian Spirituality

Our newly elected Pope Francis was educated and formed by the Jesuit principles of leadership and Ignatian spirituality. It is a rich heritage that guides him in his relationship with God and with the world. The titles in this sampler offer some insight and perspective on the key elements of the man just elected to lead the world's Catholics. From understanding the foundational pillars of Jesuit leadership to learning how to practice the simple yet powerful Examen prayer, each book offers a glimpse into the formative principles of our new Pope Francis, and a chance to enrich our lives as well.

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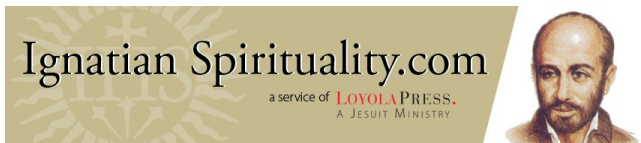
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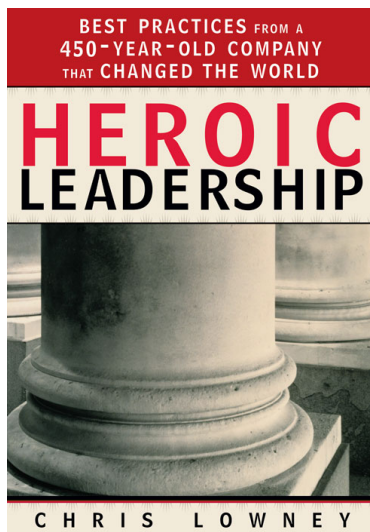
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# Heroic Leadership

Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company That  
Changed the World

Chris Lowney



Christian leaders, by definition, are called to follow a different set of leadership principles than other leaders follow. But what are they, and how do Christian leaders follow them? In *Heroic Leadership* Jesuit-seminarian-turned-investment-banker Chris Lowney examines organizational principles of effective leadership derived from the history and teachings of

the Jesuits and applies them to modern corporate culture. Based on the four core values of self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism, this book identifies practices that sixteenth-century priests developed to foster dynamic, effective leaders and achieve longevity.



Chris Lowney, a former Jesuit, named a managing director J. P. Morgan & Co. while still in his thirties and held senior positions in New York, Tokyo, Singapore, and London before leaving the firm in 2001. He is the author of the best-selling *Heroic Leadership* and *Heroic Living: Discover Your Purpose and Change the World*. Lowney lives in New York. Visit his Web site at [www.chrislowney.com](http://www.chrislowney.com).

#### Other Books by Chris Lowney

*Heroic Living: Discover Your Purpose and Change the World*

# The Jesuits

## An Accidental Company with a Purposeful Vision

Jesuits enjoy enviable brand-name recognition. But while everyone knows why Coca-Cola is famous, the Jesuit brand often summons only a vague jumble of disconnected facts, anecdotes, and images: a handy epithet to hurl at a cunning adversary in a negotiation (“Jesuitical”), the image of a priest packed into a police van at a Vietnam War protest, or of another one retiring from Congress at the behest of a disapproving pope, or of still others slaughtered by armed forces in El Salvador. *Jesuit* also brings to mind quality educational institutions, with an alumni roster including Bill Clinton, François Mitterrand, Antonin Scalia, and Fidel Castro; and quality college basketball teams, with a deep bench of perennial NCAA championship contenders, including Georgetown, Gonzaga, Boston College, Marquette, and the University of Detroit Mercy.

The ten Jesuit founders were an unlikely group, a vastly more diverse team than headed most sixteenth-century companies and organizations. Twenty-four years separated the youngest from the oldest of a motley group of Spaniards, French, and a Portuguese. Their family and socioeconomic backgrounds created an equally wide gulf. Pierre Favre was the son of poor French subsistence farmers. Francis Xavier was a Basque noble from Navarre, raised in his family’s castle and well placed to inherit a hefty benefice later in life. Like Xavier, the Castilian

Diego Laínez was also wealthy. But unlike Xavier or any of the others, Laínez also happened to be the great-grandson of a Jew and therefore a “New Christian” in the rabidly anti-Semitic code of Inquisition-era Spain. New Christians were not even permitted to join major religious orders, so it was ironic that Laínez helped found one, and more ironic still that he succeeded Loyola to become the Jesuits’ second general.

The core group slowly coalesced while studying for advanced degrees at the University of Paris, then the world’s most prestigious university system. Though most of them distinguished themselves even in that selective academic circle, their intellectual gifts varied no less widely than their backgrounds. One of them recalled Diego Laínez as being “endowed with a singular, almost divine, intellect, well nigh miraculously informed in the subtleties of various branches of learning.” On the other hand, Laínez himself couldn’t help but note Ignatius Loyola’s “limited endowments of eloquence and learning.”



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At the age of thirty-eight, well into the twilight of an average sixteenth-century lifetime, Loyola's track record hardly suggested leadership potential—two failed careers, two arrests, multiple run-ins with the Spanish Inquisition and other authorities, and no money.

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Still, the one with the “limited endowments” of eloquence and learning became the group's focal point. On the face of it, this handful of Europe's top talent had chosen to rally around a most unlikely character utterly lacking in conventional leadership credentials. At the age of thirty-eight, well into the twilight of an average sixteenth-century lifetime, Loyola's track record hardly suggested leadership potential—two failed careers, two arrests, multiple run-ins with the Spanish Inquisition and other authorities, and no money. He had no notable accomplishments, no clear prospects, no followers, and no plan.

Would you sign up with this man?

## **A Leader Twice Born**

Harvard Business School professor emeritus Abraham Zaleznik once observed that “leaders are ‘twice born’ individuals who endure major events that lead to a sense of separateness, or perhaps estrangement, from their environments. As a result, they turn inward in order to reemerge with a created rather than an inherited sense of identity.” Ignatius Loyola may have had a skimpy resumé, but he certainly qualified as twice born. Birth number one was in Azpeitia, a tiny Basque village not far from

the French border in a remote area of northern Spain. The Loyolas were minor nobles, and while nobility hardly entailed a life of luxury in isolated Azpeitia, it did bring political connections that provided Loyola's ticket out of the hinterland. The teenage Loyola served as a page to the chief treasurer of the royal court. It was his apprenticeship for a military and courtly career; little time was wasted on less critical skills like reading and writing, and plenty of time was devoted to swordsmanship and the code of chivalry that so animated Cervantes's *Don Quixote*.

Loyola's autobiography and later biographies offer only the most superficial glimpse of his early years, probably with good reason. Hagiographers tend to airbrush away the more embarrassing details of a saint's portrait, and some of Loyola's biographers were no exception. Loyola had his flaws. The Jesuit Juan Polanco, who served as Loyola's executive assistant, had occasion to hear the stories that slipped out at unguarded moments, and Polanco paints enough of a picture of "preconversion" Loyola for readers to imagine the rest: "Although much attached to the faith, [Loyola] did not live in accordance with his belief, and he did not keep himself from sin. He was especially out of order in regard to gambling, matters pertaining to women, and duelling." He was arrested at least once for misdemeanors that the local magistrate avoided detailing in deference to the Loyola family but nonetheless called "most outrageous." Another early acquaintance recalled the testosterone-charged Loyola in

action: “[Loyola] drew his sword and chased them down the street. If someone had not restrained him, either he would have killed one of them, or they would have killed him.” What grave offense had prompted this unrestrained rage? Two passersby had bumped into him in a narrow passageway.

His first career, that of military officer, didn’t last very long. It ended with the battle that started it. Loyola and his garrison had the misfortune to be guarding the Spanish citadel at Pamplona when a far superior French army came calling. The heroic if misguided Basque rallied his compatriots for a certainly futile defensive stand. It only delayed the inevitable, at the cost of his career, his self-image, and very nearly his life, thanks to a French cannonball that shattered his right leg.

A dashing rake—as Loyola fancied himself—doesn’t dash as convincingly with one leg hobbled by a battle injury. Nor do the tight-fitting leggings favored at medieval courts make for very flattering attire when a clumsily set bone leaves an ugly, pronounced protrusion below the knee. Still, the stubborn Loyola refused to surrender his military and courtly aspirations immediately, instead subjecting himself to the sixteenth-century equivalent of reconstructive cosmetic surgery. One imagines a largely self-taught “surgeon” gamely hacking away at the offending tibia with the sharpest available local excuse for a saw, and it’s safe to assume that there was no anesthesiologist on hand. It’s hard to decide what’s more remarkable: that Loyola survived

his battle injury or that he survived the subsequent surgery to repair the damage. In any event, he survived both. And while the surgery resulted in some improvement, it left him with a slight limp—and without a military career.



The Jesuits' pioneering leader This posthumous portrait of Ignatius Loyola was painted by the Renaissance master Jacopino del Conte in 1556. It is displayed in the international headquarters of the Society of Jesus in Rome.

Loyola's story unfolds with unfortunate storybook predictability: the dissolute youth, the personal crisis, the intense conversion experience. The familiar, often romanticized plot line whitewashes what must have been a much more complicated internal struggle to reconstruct some sense of self and purpose. As gruesome as it was, his leg surgery might have been the easier part of this personal reconstruction. The surgery lasted

only a few hours. But what Zaleznik would call Loyola's second birth dragged on for the better part of a decade. A profound and permanent religious conversion during his convalescence gave him a spiritual destination, but translating that goal into mature, sensible engagement in the everyday world proved a long, drawn-out, torturous process.

At first taken with fantasies of imitating the heroic deprivations he read about in popularized legends of the saints, "he thought of going to Jerusalem barefoot, and of eating nothing but plain vegetables and of practicing all [the saints'] other rigors." Though his fantasies were particular enough to encompass footwear and diet for the trip, other details were apparently of less concern to him—like what he would actually *do* once he reached Jerusalem. His family were as appalled by the ill-conceived plan as any other family would be and did what they could to talk him out of it, "His brother took to one room and then another, and with much feeling begged him not to throw himself away."

To no avail. And thus began career two. Loyola traveled more than two thousand miles in an era when few Europeans ever strayed more than ten miles from their birthplaces. He begged for food and lodging, frequently sleeping in open fields or huddled in doorways. Once so vain as to submit to a life-threatening leg operation in a desperate attempt to restore his appearance, he now swung wildly to the opposite extreme, as he related

in his autobiography (always referring to himself in the third person): “He decided to let [his hair] go its way according to nature without combing or cutting it or covering it with anything by night or day. For the same reason he let the nails grow on toes and fingers because he had been fastidious in this too.” Though Loyola was far from the first European to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he must have made for a particularly pitiful sight. Devastating outbreaks of bubonic plague still swept European cities periodically, leaving urban dwellers permanently vigilant and acutely anxious. Some towns refused entry entirely to vagrants such as Loyola who were unable to provide “passports” verifying good health. It isn’t surprising that Loyola recalled bumping into a man in Venice who took one look at the pilgrim and “fled in horror . . . presumably because he saw him so very pale.”

Against the odds, Loyola landed in Jerusalem in the fall of 1523 after an eighteen-month odyssey—and was promptly deported after three weeks. Jerusalem was a dangerous place for the few solo travelers who managed to find their way there, and the religious order overseeing pilgrim visitors was growing exasperated and impoverished from having to ransom all the Europeans taken hostage. Thus, Loyola’s second career, that of spending his life in Jerusalem imitating the heroics of the saints, evaporated as quickly, if not as violently, as his first.

The discouraged deportee backtracked from Jerusalem. After near shipwreck he reached Venice. Six more months and six hundred miles later he was in Barcelona, where at age thirty-three a resilient Loyola launched his third career: studying basic Latin grammar with a class of preteen boys. He devoted only one sentence of his autobiography to explaining this sudden shift in direction to what many might call the first sensible thing he had done with his life: “He continually pondered within himself what he ought to do; and eventually he was rather inclined to study for some time so he would be able to help souls.” He crawled forward, from grammar studies in Barcelona, through college studies in Alcalá and Salamanca, and finally to Paris, where he made the acquaintance of those who would become his Jesuit cofounders. The future “CEO” of the Jesuit company had finally landed at what most would consider the *starting point* of his life’s calling, yet he was nearly forty years old, in the twilight years of an average sixteenth-century lifespan.

### **The Personal Appeal of a Twice-Born Man**

How did anyone, much less a cross section of Europe’s best talent, ever allow himself to fall in with this guy? *Eccentric* seems too mild a word to describe Loyola’s life before reaching Paris.

Granted, his wasn’t the most straightforward way to build a resumé. Nor was his career progression the sort that impresses search committees: no painstaking climb up the corporate lad-

der, no assiduously cultivated network of power brokers, no succession of ever more accountable management positions, no track record of results as a rainmaker.

But omitted from the above itinerary of Loyola's seven-year journey from Pamplona to Paris was a life-altering detour into the tiny Spanish town of Manresa. Intending to rest there a few days, he stayed a year. Words failed his later attempts to describe with precision what happened there. But he left no doubt about the impact of the mystical experiences that overwhelmed him. One afternoon spent on the banks of the river Cardoner "left his understanding so very enlightened that he felt as if he were another man with another mind." If he added together everything he had ever learned in his lifetime, he continued, "he does not think he had got as much as at that one time."

Mystical though this experience may have been, *magic* it was not. Though in one spiritual gulp he apparently learned more about himself and the world than he had absorbed throughout his whole previous life, the profound revelation didn't bring insight about more mundane matters, such as "What *job* would I be good at?" Well, conventional wisdom notwithstanding, life is like that: there are dimensions to self-understanding beyond merely choosing a career path. Loyola left Manresa with no clearer career plan than what he had when he arrived and found himself back on the road, pursuing his vague, unrealistic plan to spend his life in Jerusalem.



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But what he *had* gained proved far more important and durable than divine career counseling—and is far more important to an understanding of lasting leadership. He walked away with deep self-understanding, able to pinpoint his flaws with greater maturity and accuracy than ever before, yet at the same time able to appreciate himself as a uniquely dignified and gifted person in a world that seemed far more positive than it did when he entered Manresa.

Though his personal pilgrimage continued, his self-punishment stopped. He determined, for example, that it was no great sin to comb one's hair. Well, minor accomplishments precede great ones. If he didn't know what job to do, his greater sense of purpose and direction now served as a personal compass of sorts. Finally, he had developed a worldview. Or in less grandiose terms, he understood how he fit into the world and that it was not a hostile place.

The self-awareness he had won was ultimately what drew others, even Europe's finest, to him. Of course, they must have been attracted in part by his natural leadership gifts, which even his eccentric history could not totally obscure—the heroism he displayed as the soldier rallying the defense of compatriots at Pam-

plona; the commitment and toughness he possessed as a pilgrim undeterred from his goal of reaching Jerusalem; and the resilient adaptability manifest in his transformation from soldier to pilgrim to remedial grammar student to university scholar. But Loyola's core appeal was not his *own* leadership traits—it was his ability to identify and unlock *others'* latent leadership potential. Each member of the founding team tells a similar story of undertaking a systematic self-examination under Loyola's personal guidance and emerging energized, focused, and able to articulate life goals and personal weaknesses. Here was supercharged mentoring from a man who modeled this poorly understood and drastically underutilized life tool. Loyola not only grasped his own strengths and weaknesses but also was generous, dedicated, and straightforward enough to guide others through their own self-assessment.

Loyola's second birth lasted years and saw him wandering a penniless beggar for thousands of miles. But he had discovered a way to spare others the trauma and lost years of his second birth while delivering the fruits of self-awareness that were borne of it. He had translated his own experiences into an accessible program of meditations and practices he called the Spiritual Exercises. The members of his multinational, socioeconomically diverse team had little in common with one another upon arriving in Paris beyond their ambitions for the highest-quality education then attainable. Their unifying team bond became

the common experience of undertaking these self-revelatory Exercises.

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As their mutual friendship developed, they banded together in a loose association to help souls. To help souls? What did *that* mean? What were their occupations? What were their products? They couldn't have answered those questions with much precision, and it showed in early endeavors. They first resurrected Loyola's quixotic early ambition to work in the Holy Land, making their way to Italy to obtain papal approval for the pilgrimage. As often happens with ambitious but poorly conceived strategies, neither they nor their plan went anywhere. No ships were sailing for Jerusalem; rising political tensions put ships venturing into the Mediterranean at unacceptably high risk of raids from Ottoman Turkish fleets. So, to their great disappointment—but, as it turned out, to their own and the world's great fortune—the ten were effectively stranded in Italy, occupying themselves by preaching on street corners, working in hospitals, and doing whatever else fit their own broad conception of helping souls. Not all of them were equally talented at street religion. Colleagues remembered Loyola in Italian town squares, gamely

preaching away in some nearly unintelligible pidgin of Spanish, Latin, and Italian, ridiculed by children who pelted the balding, limping Basque with apples.

## **The Formation of a Company**

Deeply self-aware or not, the Jesuits had, by superficial appearances, failed. In fact, however, the only thing they really failed at was escaping notice. Their drive, creativity, and resilience attracted attention to even these haphazard early efforts. As so often happens, quality was proving to be its own best advertisement, and Loyola's bungled attempts at street preaching were the only exception to the team's overall performance excellence. The pope and other church officials began to pick the group for scattered missions to preach or lecture. Soon two were destined for Parma, two for Siena, and one for Naples. "Talent will out," as the saying goes, and the Catholic Church's need for talent had rarely been greater. Martin Luther and other reformers had made extraordinary gains in Europe in little more than a generation. For more than a millennium the church had enjoyed near unchallenged hegemony in European spiritual and moral affairs, yet after a twenty-year onslaught by the reformers, the Vatican could count on secure allegiance from only a handful of countries rimming the Mediterranean. The institutional Catholic Church was an easy target: corrupt bureaucrats filled its hierarchy, and the rank and file was riddled with poorly educated, demoralized clerics. Against this backdrop, the energy,

integrity, and raw intellectual horsepower of the new arrivals from Paris combined into rare and badly needed tonic.

But like many of today's rising-star start-ups, the friends rapidly became victims of their own success and reputation. After a few years in Italy, it became obvious that Loyola's little team was on the verge of disintegrating. Already pulled in different directions, the team had amassed a backlog of projects that would have occupied "four times their number." And the centripetal force was accelerating. Within a few years the same ten would be scattered not only across Italy but across Europe and beyond: Portugal, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and India.

The prospect of inevitable dispersion spurred their first serious debates about their long-term joint future. Should they incorporate as a new religious order and elect a superior general? Or should they continue with their looser association, accepting that their far-flung assignments could mean its eventual dissolution? They discussed the issue intermittently over the course of a summer, work demands allowing. In the end they decided to incorporate. Why?

Heroism and mutual affection. Hardly what drives most companies today—big, lumbering, bureaucratic, unimaginative, competitive, anonymous modern companies. What holds most companies together today? The critical mass, scale, capital, global reach, and broad capabilities to pulverize opponents, yes.

Limited liability? Of course. The chance to become rich by going public? Naturally. But heroism and mutual affection? Not usually.

The team accepted that work opportunities would separate them physically; indeed, they relished the chances to flex their talent and imagination in uncharted territory. Shunning wide-ranging, far-flung opportunities merely to remain in close contact was out of the question. Still, they seemed convinced that there was a way to preserve the spirit that unified them even as diverse missions separated them physically. The question they asked themselves makes clear that what they got out of their company is not quite what most of us get out of our companies: “Should we have a mutual understanding so that those who are sent from our midst will still be the object of our affectionate concern as we will be of theirs?” After all, why else does anyone form or join a company? Otherwise, why not go it alone?

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Still, the decision to incorporate wasn't straightforward. There were drawbacks to consider. Sixteenth-century religious orders were not highly esteemed, and one cofounder argued that formal incorporation would only damage the team's hard-won reputation for integrity: “It seems this term ‘religious obedience’ has fallen into disfavor and has been discred-

ited among Christian people.” Moreover, they envisioned an order that would have wide-open flexibility to pursue emerging opportunities, and they feared the pope might saddle them with an already existing religious rule that would hem them in and “not provide ample opportunity and scope” for carrying out their broad vision. They wanted to protect their ability to mobilize, adapt, and innovate.

One argument convincingly trumped these negatives: “Obedience issues in an uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and heroic virtues. For one who truly lives under obedience is fully disposed to execute instantly and unhesitatingly whatever is enjoined him, no matter to him whether it be very hard to do.”

*An uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and heroic virtues.* Something else we don’t typically associate with most companies. But Loyola’s team did. Incorporation was the path to heroism and the best way to preserve mutual “affectionate concern.” They resolved to formalize their association and sought papal approval to found a new religious order to be called the *Compañía de Jesus*.

## **The Merger That Might Have Happened**

Unfortunately, as they had feared, Vatican bureaucrats did try to fold Loyola’s small team into an existing, well-established religious company, the Theatines. It would have made complete sense. The Theatines had everything Loyola’s group lacked. They were well connected, founded by a powerful cardinal

destined to become pope. They had financial resources and a growing membership, whereas the small Jesuit team was an undercapitalized upstart. But the Jesuits were determined to pursue their own revolutionary approach to religious life, and after some back-channel diplomatic maneuvering that turned a future pope into an enemy, the Jesuits won approval for their own company with its own charter. Still, there were official doubts about their long-term viability. A wary pope initially limited their membership to a maximum of sixty.

Today more than twenty thousand Jesuits work in more than a hundred countries. There are approximately two hundred Theatines.

### **The Leadership Success of Ignatius Loyola**

Somehow the story of Loyola the saint works better than that of Loyola the budding corporate leader. One wants to sand away the rough edges before featuring him in a leadership book. Sure, he was a battle hero, but the stuff about the unkempt hair has to go. And one wants to make the early Jesuit team a bit more focused in their aspirations, a bit more *corporate*. After all, they built the world's greatest education network. Why not start with their fierce determination to do so and jettison the "mutual affection" stuff?

How does one become a successful leader today? If Loyola's suggested route involves a wrecked leg, a yearlong pilgrimage, a year of intense meditation, and a couple of arrests, most



sane people would say no thank you and opt instead for the old-fashioned way to the top: get an MBA and hitch yourself to a powerful mentor.

As remarkable as the Jesuits' achievements were during Loyola's final fifteen years, even those sympathetic to his story might be tempted to wonder how much more they might have accomplished had Loyola gotten his act together at twenty-nine instead of forty-nine.

Maybe they would have accomplished *less*.

Rather than recasting Loyola's story into a conventionally acceptable mold, it's worth pondering what his actual life and his team's evolution say about leadership. One is tempted to scan Jesuit prehistory as one scans resumé: looking for tangible accomplishments and dismissing the rest. Loyola had virtually no *tangible* accomplishments to show for almost two-thirds of his life. But what he and his team did accomplish might have been just as or even more important than the classic resumé builders. The Jesuits knew themselves; they emerged from their corporate prehistory with clear ideas about how they wanted to work as a team—driven by heroism, open to new opportunities, and tightly bound by mutual support. When they finally jumped from the corporate starting block, they did so with an explosive momentum rarely seen in their era or any other. Isn't it possible that these facts are more than just coincidental? In other words, the Jesuits' immediate and sustained cor-

porate success just might have had something to do with the self-understanding and team values forged during their prehistory. And such intangibles just might, in the end, be more critical to personal and corporate success than the tangibles we prize when scanning resumé's or plotting our own futures.

Put differently, but for his military mishap at Pamplona, Loyola might well have continued his climb through the military and courtly ranks without ever taking profound stock of his strengths, weaknesses, values, and life goals. Without this self-awareness, it's very possible, even likely, that he would have accomplished less in *that* career than he did as the founder and leader of the Jesuit company, even though his Jesuit career started late in life, after a circuitous, ten-year detour. Loyola the military man might have steadily moved up whatever passed for a corporate ladder in sixteenth-century Spain. Yet without the setbacks, crises, and challenges that punctuated his *real* life he might never have grappled with who he was, what he wanted, what personal resources he had, and why he had failed along the way. Only by asking and answering those questions does one develop personal leadership capacity.

## **A Religious Order Among Many**

The question that frames this chapter—What is a Jesuit?—remains only half-answered. It's clear what the Jesuits founded their company to do: nothing specifically. Or, to give them their due, anything and everything that fit a mission state-

ment that was hardly confining: helping souls and doing it heroically. But as broad a strategic playing field as they left themselves, it wasn't *completely* wide open. They had, after all, formed a religious order, whatever that meant.

Not all Vatican opposition to the Jesuits' desire to form their own company had reflected animosity toward Loyola and his ideas. Many church bureaucrats had a more basic objection: there were already too many religious orders roaming Europe. Then as now, the great majority of clergy were *not* members of religious orders but instead tended parishes under the sponsorship and control of a local bishop. But from early in the church's history, groups of clerics or laypeople had banded together outside this network of local dioceses into so-called religious orders. Each order had slightly different rules, different traditions, and different outfits; it was confusing. Because the orders sprawled across diocesan boundaries, they were harder for bishops to supervise, and some bureaucrats feared this was exacerbating the corruption problems plaguing the church.

Some of these orders had sprouted under the charismatic leadership of a saintly founder. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, who expressed no ambition to lead a large company, nonetheless exerted a magnetism that drew more than three thousand followers within his lifetime. Other orders had been launched for no other reason than to satisfy the sheer monomania of a legacy-building ecclesiastical higher-up. Still others carved out

an occupational niche: the warrior monks of the Knights Templar vowed to protect Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land and manned a string of fortifications along popular pilgrimage routes.

But the Knights Templar were exotic departures in a tradition that spawned more contemplatives than warriors. Most orders followed monastic traditions of one sort or another. The psalmist of the Old Testament had written, “Seven times a day I praised you, and in the middle of the night I arose to confess to you.” St. Benedict took the psalmist’s words to heart, codifying in the sixth century a famous monastic rule that has governed many religious orders right up to the present. Benedictines pray communally at seven set times each day—including once *in the middle of the night*. They pass the balance of each day in quiet study, domestic labor, and contemplation. Some monks went further still in pursuit of a contemplative life. St. Bruno led six companions high into the Alps, as far as possible from the distractions of urban life. Both Bruno’s order and the sweetish liqueur his monks churned out to support themselves took their name from their remote Alpine cloister site of Chartreuse. The austere Carthusians lived (and still do today) a hermitlike existence. Each cooked his own food in a private cell within a larger communal compound, joining colleagues only for common prayer and a rare recreation period.

Hundreds of religious orders came into existence, and hundreds survive. Some are well-known, with global memberships exceeding ten thousand: the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans, for example. Others are much smaller, lesser-known groups boasting mysterious, almost cabalistic names: Scalabrinians, Eudists, Somascans, Rogationists, Rosminians, Premonstratensians, the Order of St. Paul the First Hermit, the Stigmatine Priests and Brothers, the Lebanese Maronite Order, the Camaldolese Order of Monte Corona, the Hospitaller Brothers of St. John of God, and so on.

### **An Identity of their Own**

How does one distinguish among the bewildering array? What makes them alike, and what makes them different? And how do the Jesuits fit in?

First, while each religious order may emphasize certain traditions or practices, all share membership in the Catholic Church and adherence to its core beliefs. That holds even for the Jesuits, though their enemies within the Catholic Church—and perhaps even an exasperated pope or two—have had their doubts. There is no religion of Jesuitism, nor do Jesuits exclusively dedicate themselves to a specific occupation, as did the Knights Templar. Though higher education has from early on absorbed a large majority of Jesuit manpower, the founders prepared their members to engage in any occupation that would “help souls.” Finally, the Jesuits do not distinguish themselves by unique team

colors. Few cappuccino lovers, for example, consider that their beloved stimulant takes its name from the color of the habit of a Capuchin friar; and few pedestrians crossing London's Whitefriars Street spare a thought for the monastery of white-robed Carmelites that once stood there. The Jesuits? Nothing so distinctive in their wardrobe. They were always plain old "black robes" until, as we shall see, some early Jesuits began adapting to Asian cultures in which the priestly classes wore anything but black.

Jesuits, like all religious order members, pronounce vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows mean exactly what one would suppose: no (material) personal possessions, no spouse, no sex, and when the boss says they need you in Timbuktu, you go. As if poverty, chastity, and obedience don't offer enough challenge, in rare cases religious orders have set themselves apart by professing some additional vow. Each member of the centuries-old Order of Merced—the romantically nicknamed Brothers of Ransom or Order of Captives—vowed to exchange himself as a ransom for captives. The Jesuits are another of these rare cases; most members pronounce a special fourth vow to mobilize immediately for any mission requested by the pope. Granted, it's a bit more prosaic than what the Brothers of Ransom came up with, but it's a Jesuit hallmark nonetheless.

Religious orders may comprise men or women, clerics or laypeople. Sometimes an order is divided into two or three smaller orders. There is, for example, a Dominican order of male clerics, a separate Dominican order of women religious, and a so-called third order of laypeople—all governed separately but following the tradition and vision of St. Dominic. Unlike the Dominican order, the Jesuit order is exclusively male.

Well, almost exclusively male. Mateo Sánchez would have had something to say about *exclusively*. Mateo, a.k.a. *Juana* of Austria, daughter of Holy Roman emperor Charles V, sister of King Philip II of Spain, widow of the crown prince of Portugal, was obviously very well connected, very much a woman—and just as much a Jesuit. She was one of a long list of powerful, prestigious supporters cultivated by the early Jesuits. Loyola's contacts eventually included key European power brokers such as the pope, the kings of Spain and Portugal, the Holy Roman emperor, and countless “lesser” cardinals, dukes, and princes. Jesuit membership increased fifteenfold and their operations expanded accordingly within only a few years of their founding; the rapid growth vitally depended on opportunities and financial support doled out by patrons. King John III of Portugal reportedly once gushed to an undoubtedly alarmed member of his entourage that “he would like to have the entire Society come to his kingdom, even if that were to cost him part of his empire.”

Beyond providing the Jesuits with work opportunities and financial support, well-connected or noble Europeans sometimes went so far as to petition for admission into the society, despite the fact that Loyola imposed the same rule of poverty on the well connected as on the “lesser” mortals. The company’s membership roster soon boasted names that are familiar to any tourist who has wandered Italian museums and palazzos: Borgia, Gonzaga, Acquaviva, Bellarmine. While each left wealth behind to join the Jesuits, none abandoned his family name or connections. And the company benefited no less from those connections than any successful company would today from well-networked employees sporting a Rolodex of high-powered contacts.

But every once in a while, Jesuit cultivation of Europe’s elite backfired. Loyola surely was delighted that someone as powerful as Juana of Austria had taken supportive interest in his Jesuits. His delight became dismay when an enthralled Juana announced her plan to join the Jesuits. That she was a woman who had every intention of continuing her royal lifestyle didn’t seem an insurmountable obstacle to her, and she apparently didn’t expect Loyola to be deterred by such minor considerations either. He was left with a no-win situation. To turn her down would be to risk the wrath of a spurned princess not much accustomed to being told no. To accept her would be to risk horrific embarrassment and the whiff of scandal should her royal



brother, her royal father, or the general European public learn that the fledgling Jesuits had granted the unique favor of admission to a woman known to be personally friendly with Ignatius Loyola.

Juana got her wish but was admitted on the condition that her membership remain strictly confidential. She merrily pursued her royal affairs while secretly relishing her privileged status as the only woman member of the Jesuit company she so admired. To the immense relief of Loyola and his inner circle, no lower-ranking Jesuit clerk ever inquired about the mysterious Mateo Sánchez who never seemed to show up for meals, in chapel, or in the recreation room.

To be precise, then, the Jesuits are *now* an exclusively male order, as they always have been, with only one exception—or one exception that has so far come to light.

Virtually all religious orders have something else in common: they've fallen on hard times. Pity the poor recruiter peddling "poverty, chastity, and obedience" to the MTV generation. Membership in religious orders has gone into free fall. In 1965, there were nearly 230,000 religious-order priests around the world; today there are less than 150,000—even as the Catholic population they serve has continued to grow. And the demographics don't presage a bright future: the average age of clerics in the United States is approximately sixty. The Jesuits have not been exempt from these trends. Worldwide membership

reached 36,000 in the 1960s and today hovers around 21,000. Still, they've fared better than most. Throughout much of their common history, the Jesuit order was dwarfed by the Dominican and Franciscan orders; today the Jesuit order stands as the largest fully integrated religious order in the world.

But Jesuit resiliency has been fired in far hotter crucibles than the inhospitable popular culture of the early twenty-first century, and the Jesuits' own tactics helped stoke the flames that threatened them. Loyola seemed well aware from the outset that his Jesuits' ambitious and sometimes brash operating style was dangerous. A Jesuit visiting the grand duchess of Tuscany's court railed against the excesses of wealthy women who adorned themselves with expensive baubles while the poor went without basic necessities. Loyola no doubt endorsed the sentiment, but he nonetheless rebuked the Jesuit for too bluntly hammering his hosts about their lifestyles: "We [already] have a reputation among some persons who do not trouble to find out the truth, especially here in Rome, that we would like to rule the world."

Loyola's worries proved prescient. The Jesuits never learned to keep a low profile. They inevitably found themselves in the middle of controversies, too often because they had stirred them up in the first place—and they took righteous relish in rubbing their opponents' noses in it. Over the decades, their aggrieved enemies formed the oddest collection of bedfellows. Non-Jesuit missionaries in China condemned the progressive

tactics of Matteo Ricci and his successors as heretical. Liberal Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire and Rousseau, many of them educated by the Jesuits, saw the company as the only group capable of intellectually rebutting their attacks on the Catholic Church. Politicians throughout Europe made the Jesuits a political dartboard in attempts to beat back Vatican power. Conservatives and liberals, politicians and priests, devout believers and atheists certainly could not have found anything at all to agree on, save one thing: wanting the Jesuits to go.

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By the mid-1700s, with the company reaching a membership of twenty-five thousand, the Jesuits' detractors caught up with them in spectacular fashion. Banished from one country after another, the Jesuits were entirely disbanded by the pope in 1773. The Jesuit general was jailed, their schools shut down, and their properties confiscated.

Many of the suddenly ex-Jesuits were marched to deportation ports under armed guard and sent to wander Europe as outcasts. For nearly forty years the company remained shuttered.

Truth be told, the claim that the pope *entirely* suppressed the Jesuits is a slight exaggeration. Though more than 99 percent of the company was shut down, two hundred Jesuits hung on in an unlikely jurisdiction sheltered by an unlikely defender. Cather-

ine the Great so valued the four Jesuit schools in Russia that she never allowed promulgation of the papal suppression decree on Russian soil. This rump group tenaciously exploited the loophole, electing a general from among their ranks and continuing their work. Over time, small knots of “suppressed” Jesuits crawled out of the woodwork to join this Russian Jesuit order, levering themselves back into tenuous existence. Georgetown University, alma mater of the forty-second American president, proudly boasts being the first of twenty-eight Jesuit-founded colleges in the United States. But Georgetown was founded in 1789, in the middle of the Jesuit suppression and therefore by *ex-Jesuits*. Moreover, these *ex-Jesuits* joined the Russian Jesuit order in 1805. The odd affiliation lasted only a few years, as the Georgetown team and others rejoined the global order upon its 1814 papal restoration. Those fond of history’s wackier hypotheticals can while away a few hours pondering what might have become of this Georgetown University had the Russian Revolution come before the Jesuit restoration.

Luck, shrewd diplomacy, and the shifting geopolitical landscape all played a part in keeping the Jesuit company alive through their time of crisis. But vastly more critical was the scrappy tenacity of Jesuits in the field who refused to let their company and its vision die. It’s the kind of story that plays itself out today on a smaller stage when sports teams believe in themselves enough to rally and overcome late-in-the-game deficits,

when the employees at Harley-Davidson pitch in to pull their company back from the brink of collapse, or when parents sacrifice to get their families through seemingly overwhelming financial difficulties: success that flows from the undying commitment and persistence of many, not the isolated efforts of one.

### **The Meaning of *Company***

The Jesuits are routinely called a company throughout this book, something that will grate equally on some Jesuits and non-Jesuits alike. Some Jesuits will resent the sully of their noble, lofty enterprise by the implicit association with the crass pursuit of profit. Conversely, die-hard free marketers will reject the comparison—the Jesuit order isn’t a for-profit enterprise, and it’s disingenuous to present it as a company.

But there’s a straightforward reason to call the Jesuits a company: that’s what they called themselves. When the first handful banded together, they had no name at all. People took to calling them *Iñiguistas* or *Ignatiani*—the people following Ignatius Loyola. This type of nickname had plenty of precedents. After all, the Dominicans were the followers of St. Dominic, and the Franciscans followed St. Francis. But Loyola, perhaps appalled at the prospect of a personality cult, pressed his colleagues to come up with something different. They settled on *Compañía de Jesus*, the “Company of Jesus.” In formal Latin documents the name was rendered as *Societas Iesu* (“Society of Jesus”),

hence Jesuits' occasional references to themselves as "the Society."

Whatever the first team called themselves, it certainly wasn't "Jesuits." That nickname originated in the mid-1500s. For some it was simply shorthand, but for many more the word implied something more sinister. One Englishman complained about "the most dangerous infections, and . . . irremediable poyson of the Iesuicall doctrine." Like other groups throughout history who have been labeled with offensive nicknames, the Jesuits eventually wrested control of theirs by using it themselves. Still, they never totally shook the negative connotation of *Jesuitical* that continues to appear in edition after edition of dictionaries.

So they founded a company. What kind of company did they think they were founding? What did they mean by the word? Today, *company* almost inevitably connotes a commercial enterprise. But sixteenth-century *compañías* were usually something quite different: religious organizations, military groups, or simply groups of friends. Though it may not seem like it to those laboring in obscurity within one of America's corporate behemoths, the words *company* and *companion* do, after all, share the same root. And that's exactly how the Jesuit founders understood their *compañía*: it was, first and foremost, a religious organization, made up of "companions of Jesus," in some spiritual sense. But equally they were companions and friends to one another, and they intended for that spirit to infuse their *com-*

*pañía*. Recall that a key motivation behind their incorporation was their desire to work in a group in which “those who are sent from our midst will still be the object of our affectionate concern as we will be of theirs.”

Calling the Jesuits a company highlights the parallels between their *compañía* and our modern-day companies. The more intriguing question is not whether it’s legitimate to call the Jesuits a company but why the word’s connotation has drifted so far afield of its early meanings. The Jesuit company was animated by the rich undercurrent of “friendly companionship,” and drew talented recruits eager to pursue an “uninterrupted life of heroic deeds and heroic virtues.” How many Fortune 500 companies feel that way? How many people join companies looking to prove their heroism in action? Why has the modern company so thoroughly ceased to be “a group of friends,” and is such camaraderie irretrievably lost?

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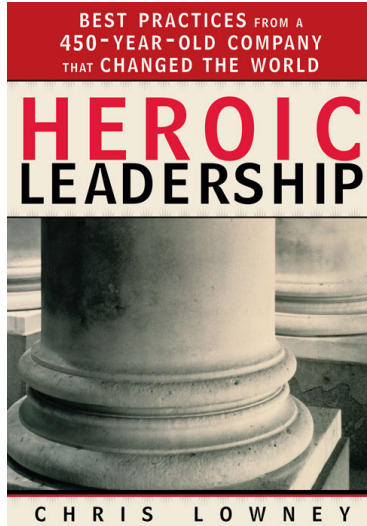
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Later chapters detail how the Jesuits built such a company and how their four-pillared approach can still mold heroic leaders today in all walks of life. But this Jesuit leadership story first skips ahead seventy years after their founding, to a man dying alone in a remote corner of China.

# Heroic Leadership

Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company That  
Changed the World

**Chris Lowney**



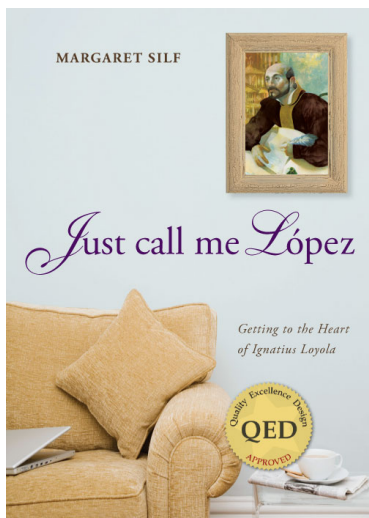
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# Just Call Me López

## Getting to the Heart of Ignatius Loyola

### Margaret Silf



What do we have in common with a man from the sixteenth century—or even more so, a saint from the sixteenth century? Probably a lot more than you think. St. Ignatius of Loyola wasn't always the heroic and holy figure that you hear about today; he was a flawed, fallible, and relatable man named Íñigo López. In *Just Call Me López* a twenty-first-century woman, Rachel,

meets the man who becomes the saint, and both are transformed by their unlikely friendship and series of thought-provoking conversations.



Margaret Silf is a popular retreat director and the best-selling author of many Loyola Press books, including *The Other Side of Chaos*, *Inner Compass*, *Close to the Heart*, and *Simple Faith*. She lives in Scotland.

### Other Books by Margaret Silf

*Close to the Heart*

*Compass Points*

*Inner Compass*

*The Other Side of Chaos*

*Simple Faith*

## Foreword

I have heard Jesuits nervously joke that they have no fear of coming face-to-face with Almighty God in Heaven, but are filled with trepidation at the prospect of meeting Ignatius of Loyola!

The biographies I've read of Ignatius over the years have done little to diminish his reputation of being somewhat fierce and forbidding. Having said that, I've noted that his contemporaries—the people who actually were with him and worked alongside him—all seemed to love him and to enjoy being with him.

It was with this in mind that I asked Margaret Silf—someone with a profound insight into Ignatian spirituality—to consider writing a short book about Ignatius that wouldn't be simply another biography but would give a twenty-first-century reader insight into this man's humanity. I asked for a telling of his story that would help us better understand what Ignatius's spiritual experiences offer us, even today.

Margaret has written a powerful work of imagination that places us with Rachel, our narrator, in contact with “López” (this is one part of Ignatius's full name) at pivotal moments in his life. We are rooted with Rachel in the present; it is Ignatius who somehow “time shifts” to be with us. This requires some suspension of disbelief, but it is a small price to pay for being

allowed to listen to these two spiritual companions who have so much to learn from each other.

Margaret has succeeded not only in showing us Ignatius's warm and compassionate character, but she also introduces us to the important stages in his journey and gives an excellent outline of his famous "Spiritual Exercises."

I love what Margaret has written here. I hope you do, too.

Paul Brian Campbell, SJ

March, 2012

## Preface

I walked along the beach one morning and noticed something glinting in the sand. When I stooped to pick it up, I had in my hand just a piece of broken glass. I could easily have hurt myself on it, but instead I held it between my fingers and watched as the sun's rays fell upon it. A miracle happened. The invisible light of the sun suddenly became visible in a whole spectrum of color as the light was refracted—bent!—through the broken glass, to create a rainbow.

Miracles so often happen in the midst of brokenness, inadequacy, and failure. In fact, those experiences would seem to be God's preferred location for the work of transformation.

In the conversations that unfold in this book, I would like to invite you to meet, and engage with, one of God's pieces of broken glass. I have called him simply López, which is his middle name. We know him more commonly as Inigo, who later took the name Ignatius of Loyola.

At the beginning of his story, we meet someone who is vain, ambitious, even arrogant, and certainly of dubious moral standing. As he gradually shares his story, we can see the transformative power of grace in action. The man we might dismiss, or even fear, at the beginning of the story, gradually discloses a history of vulnerability and imperfection. The more the vulnerability is revealed and acknowledged, the more the power of

divine light increases, penetrating the brokenness to create the rainbow.

When I was first invited to write this story, I refused, on the grounds that I have no experience in writing biography, let alone hagiography. The publishers were insistent. Over an extended breakfast, with a bottomless coffeepot and a visionary editor, in a backstreet Chicago café, I was persuaded. Not to write a biography, but to tell a story.

When I first encountered Ignatius, many years earlier, I guess I would have thought of him as someone I would probably not want to meet in heaven: a soldier, a rather legalistic individual with views of the church that would differ widely from my own, and the founder of a religious order that had the reputation of being the papal shock troops in the war against the Protestant Reformation, a war with which I would have had little sympathy. Under the wise guidance of some of his twentieth-century sons, I saw my view of him move rather toward respect, and even reverence, for someone I had to acknowledge as a saint, certainly someone much more complex than I had imagined, someone who had something important to teach us.

By the time I embarked upon the venture of this book, I realized I had developed a certain guarded affection for him. It was this incipient affection and curiosity as to what it was that made him tick that, along with the breakfast and the coffee and the enthusiastic editor, persuaded me to risk setting out on the jour-

ney that these conversations reveal. By the time I came to write the final section, when López leaves for the last time, just as a single star is rising into the night sky, I found myself writing through my tears. I knew then that López had become as much a part of my own life as he had of the narrator's. I think I can honestly say that I have never enjoyed writing a book as much as I have enjoyed this one, or been so deeply moved by any subject as I have been by this. The personal encounter with López has changed me in ways I could never have imagined. My hope is that he will tell you, the reader, his story in ways that might be transformative for you also.

Is this a work of biography or of the imagination? Both, really. The facts about Ignatius's life and person that I have included are biographically accurate. The story of the narrator, as she engages with her unexpected guest, is a work of the imagination. Rachel is not me. Her story is not my story. The interaction between them is God's story, and I hope that, as such, it will speak to *your* story.

Rachel meets López with no preconceived ideas about him. He is a stranger to her, and she does not even share his religious background. Rachel is, perhaps, a postchurch pilgrim, searching for her own deepest truth and struggling with her own life's issues, meeting heart-to-heart with López across the divide of five centuries of history and a huge cultural disconnection. That they relate so deeply with each other across these gulfs is part of

the miracle, reflecting the greater miracle that Ignatian spirituality is even more relevant to our world today than it was when he walked the length and breadth of Europe in his pilgrim sandals.

And conversations, of course, were Ignatius's preferred method of engaging with the lives of the people he met. The art of spiritual conversation is one of the most valuable aspects of his legacy to us. The conversation with Rachel would have been, for him, the most natural and obvious "way of proceeding."

Over the course of his life, with all its joys and its despair—its struggles, humiliations, and graces—López is being honed and polished by divine love, from a piece of broken glass into a finely finished prism that we can hold in our hands today, a prism through which the invisible light of God is bent and refracted into the colors of everyday life—our everyday lives.

Enjoy your pilgrimage as you explore, with him and with God, the colors of your own soul's journey—a journey that invites you to grow from bent and broken to translucent and transformed.

Margaret Silf  
February 2012



## A Story Begins

I never knew what hit me.

One minute I was cycling, somewhat distractedly, along the familiar streets of my hometown. The next minute I was sprawled on the sidewalk, stunned, my cycle a crumpled heap on the roadside. As to the cause of this disruption to the smooth running of things, all I could see of him were his exhaust fumes as he sped away from the scene, leaving not a trace behind except my demolished cycle and the searing pain in my ankle.

The street was deserted. I lay for a while, wondering how to get home. Then the stranger came up to me.

“Can I help?” he asked. “You seem to have run into trouble.”

I was speechless with gratitude. My anger with the hit-and-run driver dissolved into pure thankfulness that I was no longer alone with my problem. I looked into the face of my rescuer and saw kindly eyes. Right then, that was all I needed to see. I gratefully accepted his offer to see me back to my home. He picked up the wreckage of the bike in one firm movement and with his free hand supported my arm. Together, we hobbled home.

That’s when I became aware that he, too, had a limp. One day I would hear the story behind the limp, but right now I rested my weight on his arm and guided him back to my little apartment, a few blocks away.

“When life knocks you sideways,” he said, as we walked, “sometimes it’s the beginning of something new, something that takes you completely by surprise.”

I paused in my unsteady tracks for a moment and gazed at him. Those words seemed to have come straight from his heart. I found myself curious to know him better. I felt that he knew much more about the mystery of things than he was revealing. I wanted to know what it was that he knew, what dream fired him up, what story underpinned these little glimpses of wisdom he shed upon my plight.

He could not possibly know that my “plight” involved far more than this sudden spill from my bicycle. Or that, at the moment the car struck me, I could hardly see it for all the other scenarios alive in my mind. To say I’d been preoccupied would be an understatement. The accident had merely brought to manifestation the state of my heart that day. No, he couldn’t know this, yet he spoke as if he knew that my story was much bigger, much deeper.

By the time we had walked the half mile or so to where I lived, I felt the spirit of a deeper friendship calling us to walk many more miles together. I invited him in for coffee, knowing that this could be an encounter with unpredictable consequences. And he unhesitatingly accepted my invitation. He came in through my door that day, but he brought with him a story that would gradually coax my own story to life.

“You’re hurt,” he sympathized. But I was already forgetting the pain in my ankle because of the sense of peace I felt in this man’s presence.

“I’ll survive,” I said brightly. *Well, I hope I’ll survive, I thought, in a darker part of myself.*

“You will do more than survive,” he said. “Our hurts can be the places where we start to grow. One day you may look back with gratitude to the reckless driver who knocked you off your bike.”

Who was this stranger, sitting drinking coffee in my home? A short, thin, middle-aged man; not a local man, I felt sure, or I would have recognized him. He looked strangely out of place in the modern world. But there was something timeless in his face.

For a while he sat in silence, but it was a confident kind of silence, as if he were assessing the place and deciding whether he might feel at ease here. I was doing my own assessment, watching his face, noticing the calm surface—the look of self-possession under which, I was sure, lay a story. This man had known turmoil, loss, and disappointment. His life had not been a walk in the park. The eyes that met mine were sharp, clear, and frighteningly perceptive.

“I know this sounds bizarre,” he said, finally breaking the pregnant silence. “I actually lived more than five hundred years ago. On my five-hundredth birthday, *you* were in midlife your-

self, and going through a time of growth and turmoil, were you not?”

For a moment, I was speechless. There had certainly been serious turmoil in my life over the past twenty years or so, and just a couple of months ago, around the time of my fiftieth birthday, I had received a shocking phone call, and with it some new demands upon my life. Not only that, but my work had just recently become quite interesting, and not in a good way.

“Well,” I said with some hesitancy, “I suppose you’ve got the turmoil right. Only time will tell about the growth.”

He smiled. “Now a chance accident has thrown us together. However, I don’t think anything happens by chance.”

“I don’t have any idea who you are,” I said, after a bewildered pause, as I tried to make sense of these revelations. “And yet I feel as if I know you. I don’t even know your name.”

“Just call me López,” he replied. He looked at me, eyes raised in question.

“I’m Rachel,” I said.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Rachel. But I must go now. And you must rest.”

“I will,” I promised.

A slightly awkward silence ensued before both of us simultaneously began to speak.

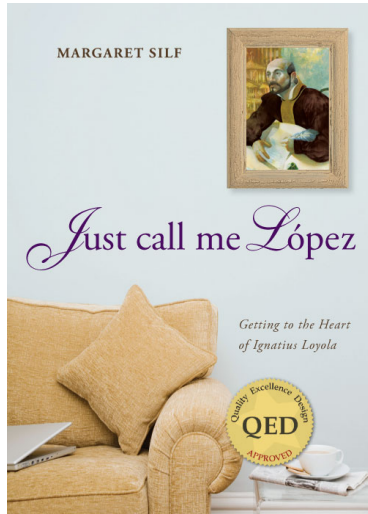
“Why don’t you come and visit again,” I began.

“It would be good to continue this conversation,” he said at the exact same moment. We laughed at ourselves.

And so it began.

What follows is the story of how it unfolded.

**Just Call Me López**  
Getting to the Heart of Ignatius Loyola  
**Margaret Silf**



**Order Now**

# The Ignatian Adventure

Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in  
Daily Life

Kevin O'Brien, SJ



In *The Ignatian Adventure* Kevin O'Brien, SJ, offers his own adaptation of the widely used 19th annotation, which allows people to “make” the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola over an extended period of time in the course of their daily lives.



Kevin O'Brien, SJ, is a former lawyer who became a Jesuit nearly 15 years ago. He regularly conducts spiritual retreats for the young and old alike. An experienced high school and college teacher, he currently serves as the executive director of campus ministry at Georgetown University.



## **The Ignatian Adventure**

As we've seen, Ignatius of Loyola as a young man left his family home in Spain to embark on an adventure that would transform countless lives, beginning with his own. Traveling across Europe and the Mediterranean, he would learn that the greatest adventures in life were not always geographic. The adventure that God had in store for Ignatius was about traveling the distance between the head and the heart and about inspiring in Ignatius bold, holy desires for God's greater glory and the service of others.

Ignatius gave the church the Spiritual Exercises as a testament to God's gentle, persistent laboring in his life. Over his lifetime, Ignatius became convinced that the Exercises could help other people draw closer to God and discern God's call in their lives, much as they had helped him.

The Exercises have never been for Jesuits alone. Ignatius crafted the Exercises as a layman, and he intended them to benefit the entire church. He honed them as he offered the Exercises to a variety of people. Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, the Society of Jesus has continued to offer the Exercises in varied and creative ways to ever-increasing numbers of people.

By making the Spiritual Exercises available and leading people through them, Jesuits share their heritage with the world, including with their students and colleagues in ministry. This is especially important as laypersons assume more active roles in

Jesuit universities, schools, parishes, and other works. This book offers one way that the Exercises may be offered to individuals and groups. Before exploring the different ways that this book can be used, let's look more carefully at the time-tested genius of the Exercises.

## Spiritual Exercises

People interested in the Exercises may be familiar with other spiritual classics, such as those by John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, Thomas Merton, or Dorothy Day. Such books can be read privately and prayerfully. Their style may be mystical, poetic, or descriptive. The books have the form of narrative or exhortation. The *Spiritual Exercises* is nothing like those works. Ignatius's *Exercises* makes for very dry reading—it's more like reading a cookbook or how-to guide. The retreatant need not even read the book of the *Exercises* because Ignatius intended the book as a manual for spiritual directors or guides to lead others through the Exercises (*SE 2*). In one sense, there is nothing new in the Exercises: Ignatius relied on prayer forms and spiritual traditions deeply rooted in the church. What is distinctive is how Ignatius artfully weaves them together and how much he emphasizes the experiential and practical in the life of prayer.

Thus, the **purpose of the Exercises** is very practical: to grow in union with God, who frees us to make good decisions about our lives and to “help souls.” Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can

learn to think and act more like Christ. The Exercises help us grow in interior freedom from sin and disordered loves so that we can respond more generously to God's call in our life (*SE* 2, 21). The Exercises demand much of us, engaging our intellect and emotions, our memory and will. Making the Exercises can be both exhilarating and exhausting; it's no wonder that Ignatius compared making the Spiritual Exercises to doing physical exercise, such as "taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running" (*SE* 1).

The Exercises are a school of prayer. The two primary forms of praying taught in the Exercises are meditation and contemplation. In **meditation**, we use our intellect to wrestle with basic principles that guide our life. Reading Scripture, we pray over words, images, and ideas. We engage our memory to appreciate the activity of God in our life. Such insights into who God is and who we are before God allow our hearts to be moved.

**Contemplation** is more about feeling than thinking. Contemplation often stirs the emotions and inspires deep, God-given desires. In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius. Scripture has a central place in the Exercises because it is the revelation of who God is, particularly in Jesus Christ, and of what God does in our world. *In the Exercises, we pray with Scripture; we do not study it.* Although Scripture

study is central to any believer's faith, we leave for another time extended biblical exegesis and theological investigation.

## **The Movements of the Exercises**

The Exercises have a natural rhythm. Ignatius divides the Exercises into four "weeks" (*SE* 4). These weeks are not calendar weeks but phases or movements felt within a person who is praying through the Exercises:

- **Preparation Days:** Just as marathon runners do not begin a race with a sprint, we start the Exercises slowly and gently. We till the soil a bit before doing any planting. In the first days of the full Exercises, we consider the gift of God's ongoing creation in the world and in us. We pray for a spirit of awe and gratitude for the gifts of God in our lives. We hope to experience a deeply felt sense of God's unconditional love for us.
- **First Week:** Having recognized God's boundless generosity to us, we naturally face our own limited response. We let God reveal to us our sinfulness and need for conversion. We acknowledge how we have misused God's gift of freedom. With God's help, we recognize and understand the patterns of sin in our lives. We do so in the context of knowing deep down how much God loves us and wants to free us from everything that gets in the way of loving God, others, and ourselves—that is,

from everything that makes us unhappy. We pray for the grace of embracing ourselves as loved sinners. We keep our gaze fixed always on God's mercy.

- **Second Week:** Having experienced God's faithful love, we are moved to respond with greater generosity. We want to love and serve God and others more. As we pray through the life of Jesus Christ presented in the Gospels, we ask to know him more intimately so that we can love him more dearly and follow him more closely. We come to appreciate Jesus' values and his vision of the world. This heartfelt knowing that leads to concrete action is a defining grace of the Exercises.
- **Third Week:** Our deepening personal identification with Jesus inspires us to want to be with him in his suffering and death. We spend time contemplating the Lord's passion, which is the consummate expression of God's faithfulness and love for us.
- **Fourth Week:** Just as we accompany Jesus in the Passion, we walk with the Risen Lord in the joy of the resurrected life. We continue to learn from him as he consoles others. Having savored God's love for us and our world, we pray with a generous heart to find God in all things, to love and serve God and others in concrete ways and with great enthusiasm.

A caution: neatly laying out the retreat in this way can be misleading, as though we were in control. To the contrary, we follow the lead of the Spirit, as Ignatius did, and the Spirit may lead us through some twists and turns along the way. We should not follow the book of the Exercises in a mechanical way because God works with each of us so uniquely. A trusted mentor or spiritual guide can help us navigate these movements of the soul.

## **Discernment**

The **discernment of spirits** underlies the expanse of the Exercises. The one who discerns is like the adventurers who test the winds or check a compass to make sure they're heading in the right direction. In discernment of spirits, we notice the interior movements of our hearts, which include our thoughts, feelings, desires, attractions, and resistances. We determine where they are coming from and where they are leading us; and then we propose to act in a way that leads to greater faith, hope, and love. A regular practice of discernment helps us make good decisions.

In the course of the Exercises, some people make important life decisions. The decision may concern a significant relationship, a career or religious vocation, or a change in lifestyle or habits of living. The Exercises provide many helps in making such decisions. The key is being open to the Spirit, who will present us with these decisions and guide us in making them. For others, the Exercises are not about making a big decision about

what to do but about how to be. In other words, they teach us how to live, think, pray, love, and relate in the context of commitments we've already made.



As with any genuine adventure, we cannot know at the outset where we will end up. But we can be assured that God, who is always faithful, will be with us and will lead us where we need to go. Though uncertain of where our journey will end, we know where it begins: here and now. God chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ, living in the beauty and brokenness of our world. It is in *this* place and *this* time, in the details of our individual lives, where we meet God.

By even exploring an invitation to make the Exercises in some form, you have taken the first step on the journey and revealed a generous spirit. Ignatius commends such magnanimity at the opening of the Exercises:

The persons who make the Exercises will benefit greatly by entering upon them with great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord, and by offering all their desires and freedom to him so that His Divine Majesty can make use of their persons and of all they possess in whatsoever way is in accord with his most holy will. (*SE* 5)

Such courage, openness, and generosity are attributes of adventurers following in the footsteps of Ignatius. He has blazed for

us a fascinating trail, which runs from his life to Christ's life through our very own. To better understand where our particular trail begins, we now explore the different ways we may experience the Exercises and make use of this particular guidebook.



## Different Paths, Same Journey

The book of the *Spiritual Exercises* opens with twenty preliminary notes, or annotations. A theme runs through these notes: **adaptability**. Ignatius's own conversion taught him that God works with each person uniquely, so he insisted that the Exercises be adapted to meet the particular needs of the one making them. The goal is drawing closer to God, not mechanically running through all of the exercises in order or in unison with others. In other words, the end of the Exercises is a Person, not a performance.

### Ways of Making the Exercises

Some people have the opportunity to make the Exercises over thirty or more consecutive days, usually removed from regular life in a retreat house setting. This retreat is described in the **twentieth annotation**. (Jesuits make this “long retreat” at least twice in their lives.) Ignatius realized that many people do not have the luxury of time or resources to make a thirty-day retreat. Thus, in the **nineteenth annotation**, he describes how a person may be directed through the entirety of the Exercises but over an extended period of time, while continuing his or her ordinary daily affairs. Others, because of age, experience, life circumstance, or time constraints, cannot cover the full breadth of the Exercises. Instead, they pray through particular parts of the Exercises, such as during a weekend or weeklong retreat or a day of prayer. This is an **eighteenth-annotation** retreat.

The preliminary notes reveal Ignatius's intention to offer the Exercises to many people, but in different ways. We should resist judging one way of making the Exercises against another, as if one way were superior. Instead, the adaptability of the Exercises poses the question, Which way is most suitable to the person desiring to make the Exercises?

### **How This Book Can Be Used**

Even within each format for making the Exercises there is ample room for adaptation. This book offers such flexibility and can be used by those who are creatively adapting the Exercises to meet the needs of people today. However it is used, this book, like the text of the Spiritual Exercises itself, is to be experienced, not read. It's a handy guide that invites pray-ers to encounter the living God, who is active in their lives and the larger world.

First, the book may be used in its entirety to facilitate an eight-month-long retreat in daily life. In the pages that follow, there are thirty-two weeks of prayer, with suggestions for every day. For a nineteenth-annotation retreat like this, the more traditional practice is for the retreatant to pray daily on his or her own and then meet one-on-one with a spiritual director every week or so. The spiritual director, who serves as a guide for the journey, is central to the Exercises offered in this format. The director listens to the experience of retreatants and helps them discern the movement of God in their prayer and in daily events. The director may adapt the outline of the retreat

presented in this book to the particular circumstances of a retreatant.

As important as the role of the director is, Ignatius reminds us in the introductory notes to the Exercises that the chief spiritual director is God, who communicates with each person. The director should make every effort not to get in the way:

It is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future. Accordingly, the one giving the Exercises ought not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer on a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord. (*SE 15*)

In recent years, Jesuit universities, high schools, and parishes have experimented with this traditional model because there was a great demand for the Exercises but not enough directors to meet with each retreatant individually. One adaptation that has proved successful is to offer the Exercises to groups of prayers. Instead of meeting one-on-one with a director, retreatants meet in a small group facilitated by a director. Even if a person makes the Exercises individually with a director, he or she may enjoy getting together with others who are making the Exercises. Some Jesuit institutions offer monthly gatherings for those on

retreat in daily life to share the graces of the retreat and to listen to presentations about the Exercises. Such gatherings help to build community and to bolster the Ignatian identity of a university, school, or parish.

Second, the book may be used to help structure shorter experiences of prayer. A person or group might pray the Exercises in discrete blocks. The book is divided into five segments based on Ignatius's "weeks," which may be helpful in arranging such prayer experiences. One creative approach may be to adapt the prayer materials to the liturgical season—for example, praying with the Third Week material during Lent or with the Fourth Week material during the Easter season.

Third, for those who have made the Exercises before, the book may serve as a helpful way to deepen some of those graces. Such an experienced pray-er may skip around to different parts of the book to revisit the Exercises, all depending on where God is leading him or her.

Finally, for someone who is looking for structure in personal prayer life, the book may be a helpful companion because it offers suggestions for prayer around various themes. Such prayers shouldn't try to make the Exercises from start to finish on their own, without the help of an experienced guide. But certainly they can use the book to dip their toes in the water, to become familiar with the rhythm and techniques of Ignatian prayer. The rules for discernment of spirits scattered throughout

the book may also be helpful for people seeking to ground decisions and values in their faith.



Although the Exercises are a valuable gift to God's people, they are not for everyone. Ignatius would be the first to insist that the Exercises are only a means to an end. There are other ways of praying that help us grow in intimacy with God and that inspire a life of service to others. But if a person is called to experience the Spiritual Exercises in some form, he or she is in for an exciting, unpredictable, challenging, and perhaps life-changing adventure.

# The Ignatian Adventure

Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in  
Daily Life

**Kevin O'Brien, SJ**

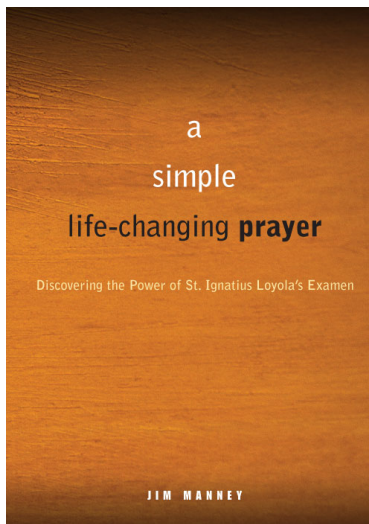


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# A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer

## Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen

### Jim Manney



In *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer* Jim Manney introduces Christians to a 500-year-old form of prayer that dramatically altered his perception of prayer and the way he prayed. The prayer is the examen, which St. Ignatius Loyola developed for the purpose of nurturing a reflective habit of mind that is constantly attuned to God's presence. What makes the

prayer so powerful is its capacity to dispel any notion that God is somewhere “up there,” detached from our day-to-day tasks and concerns. Instead, the examen leads us into a relationship with a God who desires to be personally caught up in the lives of those whom he created. By following five simple yet powerful steps for praying the examen, we can encounter the God who, as Scripture tells us, “is not far from each one of us”—the God

whose presence in our lives can make all the difference in the world.





Jim Manney is coauthor of the book *What's Your Decision?* as well as the editor of many books on Ignatian spirituality, including *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* He is a senior editor for Loyola Press. Jim and his wife live in Michigan.

### Other Books by Jim Manney

*What's Your Decision?*

with J. Michael Sparough, SJ and Tim Hipskind, SJ

*Charged with Grandeur*

*God Finds Us*

## Preface

The *examen* changed everything for me, but that almost didn't happen. For years I had occasionally heard people talk about the examen as a good way to pray. I went to a Jesuit college; I remember one of my teachers saying that St. Ignatius of Loyola himself thought that the examen was *the* indispensable prayer. But I wasn't interested because I thought they were talking about the Examination of Conscience.

The Examination of Conscience was the methodical inventory of sins that I was taught to do as a boy in Catholic schools of the 1960s. I would work my way through lists of faults, toting up my offenses in preparation for the sacrament of confession. This was a grim exercise, also a confusing one. I understood lying, and eventually I knew what lust was. But what was "acedia?" (It means spiritual laziness.) At any rate, the charm of the Examination of Conscience wore off as I grew older. I set it aside and moved on to other things, not all of them improvements. When people talked about the examen, this is what I thought they meant, and I wasn't interested. I thought it was just the thing for people who like that kind of thing, but I wasn't one of them.

Then I learned that the Ignatian examen was *not* the old, depressing Examination of Conscience. Quite the opposite. This was a prayer that focused on God's presence in the real world. It looked to a God who was near to me, present in my

world, and active in my life. It told me to approach prayer with gratitude, not guilt. It helped me find God in my life as I lived it, not in some heavenly realm beyond space and time. The examen had me take myself seriously, as I was, not as I wished I was or thought I could be someday if I worked hard enough.

It's no exaggeration to say that the examen changed everything. It might change things for you too.

## The Examen in a Nutshell

*I don't know exactly what a prayer is.*

*I do know how to pay attention.*

—Mary Oliver, “The Summer Day”

The *examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

1. Ask God for light.

I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.

2. Give thanks.

The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.

3. Review the day.

I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.

4. Face your shortcomings.

I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.

5. Look toward the day to come.

I ask where I need God in the day to come.

Simple? Yes. Easy? Not really. Sometimes praying the examen is smooth and joyful; sometimes it's arduous. If the examen prayer is doing its job, it will bring up painful moments and cause you to look at behavior that's embarrassing. Sometimes you squirm praying the examen, but why would you have it otherwise? Real prayer is about change, and change is never easy.

But there's nothing complicated or mysterious about making the examen part of your life. The subject matter of the examen *is* your life—specifically the day you have just lived through. The examen looks for signs of God's presence in the events of the day: lunch with a friend, a walk in the park, a kind word from a colleague, a challenge met, a duty discharged. The examen likes the humdrum. God is present in transcendent “spiritual” moments, but he's also there when you cook dinner, write a memo, answer email, and run errands. The examen looks at your conscious experience. The ebb and flow of your moods and feelings are full of spiritual meaning. Nothing is so trivial that it's meaningless. What do you think about while sitting in traffic or waiting in a long line at the grocery store? What's your frame of mind while doing boring and repetitive chores? You'll be surprised at how significant such moments can be when you really look at them.

The examen surprised me because it was so unlike prayer as I had previously understood it. Prayer for me was a time set apart. With the examen the boundaries between prayer and life

became blurred. People usually pray the daily examen at a set time (for me usually in the morning), but there's no reason why we can't pray the examen while standing in that long line at the grocery store. After all, God is there too.

But in another way the examen didn't surprise me at all. God is certainly there while you're standing in line. All you need to pray the examen is a little quiet time. This made intuitive sense. I am God's creature living in God's world; *of course* God would be present in my everyday experience. If prayer is making a connection with God, it makes perfect sense to spend some time finding God in my conscious experience of daily life.

In fact, the examen is a very old practice. The word *examen* comes from a Latin word that means both an examination and the act of weighing or judging something. It's as old as Socrates's instruction to "know thyself." A practice of regular self-scrutiny is found in most religions of the world, and this is certainly the case with Christianity. To follow the path of Jesus, we must regularly scrutinize our behavior and ask how closely our actions conform to Christ's.

Five hundred years ago, St. Ignatius of Loyola made an innovative twist on this ancient tradition of prayerful reflection. He made it a way to experience God as well as to assess our behavior. Ignatius's famous book *The Spiritual Exercises* is a guide to an intense experience of conversion to the cause of Christ. He designed the daily examen to sustain and extend this experi-

ence. Ignatius wanted to help people develop a reflective habit of mind that is constantly attuned to God's presence and responsive to God's leading. The examen became the foundation for this graced awareness. Ignatius wanted Jesuits to practice the examen twice a day—at noon and before sleep. He considered it so important that he insisted that Jesuits pray the examen even when they were too busy to pray in other ways.

Over the centuries, the practice of the Ignatian examen has taken on different forms. For a long time it closely resembled the Examination of Conscience that troubled the prayer of my youth. In recent decades Jesuits have been restoring the examen to something more closely resembling Ignatius's original vision for a prayer practice that would help us find God in our everyday lives and respond more generously to his gifts and blessings. That's the form of the examen that's presented in this book.

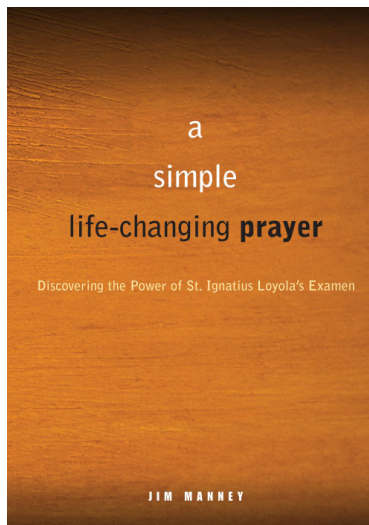
I've read everything about the examen that I could find. Interestingly, there's not a lot written about it. Except for a couple of small books and a few learned essays, most of what I found has been pamphlets, flyers, and web pages that give a brief overview. That's not really a surprise because most people learn about prayer by talking to other people. News of the examen spreads by word of mouth. But at some point a book might be helpful, at least for some people. I hope this is that book.

The examen isn't the only way to pray, but it's a way that everyone can pray. It banishes the abstract and relishes the con-

crete. It is inexhaustible. It treats every moment of every day as a blessed time when God can appear. It's a way to find God in all things.



**A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer**  
Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's  
Examen  
**Jim Manney**

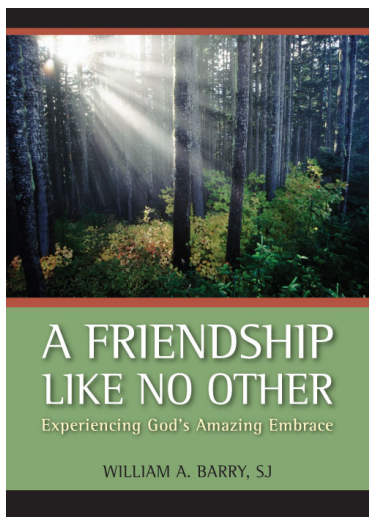


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# **A Friendship Like No Other**

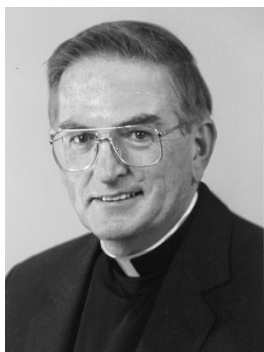
## Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace

### **William A. Barry, SJ**



Grounded in biblical tradition but with a clear focus on Ignatian spirituality, *A Friendship Like No Other* offers a fresh approach to becoming a friend of God. Eschewing the idea that God is a distant, solitary figure to be feared, renowned spiritual director William A. Barry, SJ, provides us with all the tools needed to become a friend of God.

*A Friendship Like No Other* offers three well-supported and practical sections: prayerful exercises to help lead us to the conviction that God wants our friendship; a close look at objections to this idea; and reflections on experiencing the presence of God and discerning those experiences. Brief, personal meditations are woven throughout.



William A. Barry, SJ, is a veteran spiritual director who is currently serving as tertiary director for the New England Province of the Society of Jesus. He has taught at the University of Michigan, the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, and Boston College. His many works include *Letting God Come Close, A Friendship Like No Other, Here's My Heart, Here's My Hand, Seek My Face*, and *God's Passionate Desire* (Loyola Press) and *God and You*.

#### Other Books by William A. Barry, SJ

*Letting God Come Close*

*Here's My Heart, Here's My Hand*

*Seek My Face*

*God's Passionate Desire*

*Changed Heart, Changed World*

*Praying the Truth*

## **Going Deeper in Friendship with God: Coming to Know Jesus as a Friend**

If you have entered into a relationship of intimacy with God, you may now notice a change in your desire. You may begin to want to engage more cooperatively in the divine purpose of creation. If you are a Christian, perhaps you want to know Jesus—in whose eyes you saw forgiveness and love—more intimately in order to love him more ardently and follow him more closely, which Ignatius posits as the desire of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises. If this is your desire, you want Jesus to reveal himself, to let you know what makes him tick, what he loves and hates, what he dreams. Such revelation is the necessary condition for falling in love with him and wanting to follow him. In terms of the developmental scheme of friendship outlined in the first chapter, those who have come this far in their relationship with the Lord enter a stage of generativity.

This stage has its ups and downs, as it becomes clearer what being a companion of Jesus entails. After all, if we become his companions, we are liable to meet the same obstacles and enmity he met and suffer the same fate. So at this stage, we experience both an attraction to Jesus and his way of being human and a resistance. Those who persevere in the growing friendship with Jesus find themselves becoming freer of the attachments that prevent them from following the way of Jesus, from joining him in pursuing God's project in this world.

## **Coming to Know Jesus through Contemplation of the Gospels**

If you are experiencing the desire to know Jesus more intimately now that you have experienced healing and forgiveness, you can begin with some contemplation of the Gospels. Contemplation, as Ignatius means it, is a rather simple way of using the Gospels for prayer. You begin each period of prayer by expressing your desire to know Jesus more intimately in order to love him more deeply and follow him more closely. Then you read a passage of the Gospels and let it stimulate your imagination in the way a good novel can.

People have different kinds of imaginations. Some are able to make something like a movie of each scene. They watch and listen as the scene unfolds in their imagination. I do not have that kind of imagination. I don't see anything, for the most part. My imagination is not pictorial; I seem to intuit the story or feel it. I was helped in understanding and trusting my imagination by realizing that I have visceral reactions to stories—I wince when I hear of someone hitting his finger with a hammer, and I weep when I hear people's stories of pain and loss. Each of us needs to be content with and trust the imagination we have. In contemplating the Gospel stories, don't be afraid to let your imagination go.

The Gospels are stories written to engage our imaginations, hearts, and minds so that we will come to know, love, and follow

Jesus. They are meant to elicit reactions and, ultimately, a faith that shows itself in action. They are not biographies or historical documents or theological discourses.

As you begin to contemplate the Gospels with the hope of getting to know and love Jesus more, it is important to remember that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical human being who was born in a small territory in Palestine controlled by the Roman Empire. It is difficult for many Christians to take seriously that Jesus was a real human being because of the training and teaching they have had. They can say that Jesus was fully human, but the emphasis of most catechetical training and preaching has been on his divinity. And, to be truthful, many Christians think that calling Jesus divine means that he knew everything, including the future; that he always knew what others were thinking, because he could read minds; and that he could do anything he wanted to do, because he was God. In reality, such a view of Jesus of Nazareth does not take his humanity seriously; many Christians consider Jesus' humanness only when reflecting on his horrible suffering at the Crucifixion.

The Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar N. T. Wright explains this approach and offers an alternative:

Western orthodoxy has for too long had an overly lofty, detached, and oppressive view of God. It has always tended to approach Christology by assuming this view of God, and trying to fit Jesus into it. The result has been a Jesus

who only seems to be truly human, but in fact is not. My proposal is not that we know what the word “God” means, and manage somehow to fit Jesus into that. Instead, I suggest that we think historically about a young Jew, possessed of a desperately risky, indeed apparently crazy, vocation, riding into Jerusalem, denouncing the Temple, dining once more with his friends, and dying on a Roman cross—and that we somehow allow our meaning of the word “God” to be re-centered on that point.

In contemplating the Gospels, take this advice to heart. Be sure to take Jesus’ humanity seriously even as you reflect on his divine attributes. God took humanity seriously enough to become one of us, and we do God no service if we downplay what God has done in becoming human.

When we use our imagination in the contemplative way Ignatius suggests, we trust that God’s Spirit will use it to reveal something important for us about Jesus so that we will love him and want to follow him. The only way that we can get to know another person is through revelation; the other must reveal him- or herself to us. In contemplating the Gospels, we are asking Jesus to reveal himself to us.

## **Examples of Contemplation of the Gospels**

In the Second Week of *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius gives two models of what he means by contemplation. A few points

drawn from these exercises may help you understand what he recommends.

The first story from the Gospels presented for contemplation is that of the Incarnation. The text in Luke's Gospel says, "In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth" (1:26). Ignatius shows how his own imagination was moved by the words of Scripture: he imagined a conversation in heaven in which the Trinity looks down on the whole world and, seeing it in such sad shape, decides to send the Son. Scripture says nothing about such a heavenly conversation, but the words *was sent by God* impelled Ignatius's imagination in that direction. You, too, can let the words touch your imagination, hoping that in this way you will learn something about the ways of God.

Here is Ignatius's first suggestion for contemplating the Incarnation:

I will see the various persons, some here, some there.

First, those on the face of the earth, so diverse in dress and behavior: some white and others black, some in peace and others at war, some weeping and others laughing, some healthy and others sick, some being born and others dying, and so forth.

Second, I will see and consider the three Divine Persons, seated, so to speak, on the royal canopied throne of Their Divine Majesty. They are gazing on the whole face and cir-



cuit of the earth; and they see all the peoples in such great blindness, and how they are dying and going down to hell.

Third, I will see Our Lady and the angel greeting her. Then I will reflect on this to draw some profit from what I see. (*The Spiritual Exercises*, n. 106)

In his second and third suggestions, Ignatius invites the retreatant to listen to what the people are saying and consider what they are doing. Ignatius is giving your imagination carte blanche to engage with the text. Try it and see what happens. If you feel the urge, talk to Mary or Joseph and ask them to help you grasp what is happening. Talk with Jesus or with God the Father. At the end of each period of prayer, take a few minutes to reflect on what has happened and perhaps jot down some notes. You can go back to the same contemplation on another occasion to determine if there is more to see and hear and learn.

In the second contemplation, on the Nativity, Ignatius tells the retreatant to imagine where it took place: “Here it will be to see in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider its length and breadth, whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills” (*The Spiritual Exercises*, n. 112). He does not give a description of the terrain, although he had been to the Holy Land; instead, Ignatius leaves it up to the imagination of the person. Artists throughout history have used their imaginations to paint scenes of the Gospels, most of the time using the scenery and people they were familiar with as models. And

many, like Rembrandt and Caravaggio, painted themselves into the scenes depicted. This is the kind of imagination Ignatius encourages.

We can also glean an understanding of the way contemplation works from Ignatius's own experience of contemplating the Nativity. He extols the poverty of the holy family, yet because of his own social background (he was born into a noble Basque family), he cannot conceive that Mary would not have a maidservant along to help her, although that would be highly unlikely in the historical circumstances. Thus, in the first point of the contemplation on the Nativity, he writes:

This is to see the persons; that is, to see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the infant Jesus after his birth. I will make myself a poor, little, and unworthy slave, gazing at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, just as if I were there, with all possible respect and reverence. (*The Spiritual Exercises*, n. 114)

This kind of contemplation encourages each of us to let our imagination go. A pediatrician I know helped Mary deliver Jesus; a young Jesuit played a drum for the infant Jesus; an expectant mother received the infant Jesus from the hands of Mary.

After these two contemplations, Ignatius is quite sparing in his suggestions, because he does not want to get in the way of the person making the Exercises, nor does he want the one

giving the Exercises to interfere. The one giving the Exercises should, writes Ignatius, “allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord” (*The Spiritual Exercises*, n. 15). I encourage you to use the Gospel stories as a vehicle for Jesus to reveal himself to you. And remember to beware of jumping too quickly to thoughts of Jesus’ divinity. Let his humanity reveal to you who God is and how God wants you to live your human life as an image of God.

### **Jesus as a Difficult Friend**

As you get to know and love Jesus, you will notice that he meets you in unexpected ways. Jesus can be a difficult friend, one who challenges and makes demands as well as supports and comforts. At times, you may want to tell him things like “I can understand why so many of your disciples left you. You’re too much. It would be absurd for me to try to live the way you lived.” You may well understand his family’s concern that he was crazy (see Mark 3:21) and the religious leaders’ belief that he was possessed by a demon (see Mark 3:22).

The only way forward in this friendship is to tell Jesus what you really feel and think and then wait for his response. Jesus responds in different ways to different people. Some have vivid imaginary conversations in which Jesus says surprising things. For example, one man who was struggling with an addiction asked Jesus to remove it. He heard Jesus say, “I can’t. But we can overcome it together.” For others, a phrase from Scripture that

comes to mind may feel like an answer to prayer. Sometimes the response comes later in the day or week as an “aha” experience that brings closure to a situation or shows a way to move forward.

Most people who walk with Jesus in this contemplative way come to realize that following him is demanding and challenging. He promises nothing but his friendship and a share in his project. We see this in Mark’s Gospel: at one point, Peter responds to Jesus’ question “Who do you say that I am?” with “You are the Messiah” (8:29). Jesus responds with a hard teaching:

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words

in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:31–38)

A difficult friend indeed. As you contemplate texts such as this one, you will have various reactions, some of which you may not like. Don't be afraid of any of your reactions. Just talk with Jesus about them. You may also want to talk with other characters in the scene to get their take on Jesus. For example, you could ask Peter why he responded as he did to Jesus' prediction of his passion and how he felt after the tongue-lashing he got from Jesus.

Getting to know Jesus can be discomfiting, to say the least. Mark's Gospel gives us an example of how disconcerted a person can become. Shortly after the previous scene, a young man runs up to Jesus and asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (10:17–22)

Because of this man's addiction to his possessions, he could not follow through on his desire to do more. Notice that he goes away grieving: he knows that he is losing something precious. How do you feel as you contemplate this scene?

You may occasionally find yourself feeling something like what this rich man felt. You, too, may want to follow Jesus completely but feel that something is standing in the way. You know that a total commitment to Jesus means sacrificing something in your life that you believe you cannot do without. What are you to do? After I gave a talk on prayer, a professor engaged me in this dialogue:

“I want a closer relationship with God, but I know that if I do get close to God, I will have to do something I do not want to do.”

“Why don't you tell God that you don't want to do it?”

“Can I do that?”

“We are talking about a friendship here. You can tell God anything in your heart and then see how God responds.”

That's the advice I would give you, too. Anything that comes up in these contemplations is grist for the mill of your relationship with Jesus. Remember that friendship develops through mutual transparency.

Does Jesus love the rich man any less when he goes away? Does he love the professor any less because he's stuck? If you

have gotten to know Jesus, you will have an answer, I'm sure. For my part, I do not believe that Jesus loved the rich man any less, but I do believe that Jesus was disappointed. I suspect, however, that his disappointment stemmed from the fact that the man would not continue the dialogue but walked away. If he had stayed with Jesus, he might have been able to say, "I cannot give up my wealth, but I wish that I could. Help me." That would have continued the conversation, and the friendship would have grown. You might want to extend your contemplation of the Gospel by going on to the following verses, where Jesus expresses his astonishment at how hard it is for those with riches to enter the kingdom of God.

### **Contemplating Jesus' Passion and Death**

Contemplation of the Gospels with the desire to know Jesus better, love him more ardently, and follow him more closely leads inevitably to the Crucifixion. When we walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, we find ourselves wanting to share in his passion and death, and perhaps dreading it. We are ready to enter what Ignatius calls the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises. Again we are asking Jesus to reveal himself, but this time we are seeking the hard revelation of what it was like for him to go through this terrible week trusting in his Father when he had no one else in whom to trust. This revelation is difficult because it is painful to see Jesus, who has by now become a close friend, go through this agony, abandoned by his friends, betrayed by one of them,

accused by the leaders of his own religion of leading the people astray, and flogged, mocked, and hung naked on a Roman cross to die a horrible death.

Those who contemplate these scenes often find themselves resisting the revelation they desire. They may focus on all the other characters in the scenes rather than on Jesus. They may find themselves angry with God for allowing this horror. But if they continue to ask Jesus to reveal himself, they will find themselves drawn into a deeper love for him and a deeper sympathy. One woman I directed wept with relief when Jesus finally died. Contemplation of Jesus on the cross brings a heavy load. But just as it is consoling to share the pain of a friend's illness and death, it is consoling to share Jesus' pain and suffering and loneliness.

It can also be harrowing, as we see all our illusions about God being destroyed. Jesus experiences God's powerlessness to preserve him from this horror. Our own often unconscious image of God as one who saves the good from such a fate, who intervenes to strike down our enemies, is dashed. This experience, too, however, can be an opportunity for a deepening of our friendship with God. If we continue on the path of mutual transparency, we may see the truth of this observation made by Rowan Williams, the archbishop of Canterbury:

We need to see the Father's weakness and powerlessness as the inevitable and necessary corollary of the Son's pow-



erlessness in a world of corrupt and enslaving power . . . .  
“God” vanishes on the cross: Father and Son remain, in the  
shared, consubstantial weakness of their compassion.

In the last sentence, Williams puts the word *God* in quotation marks because the “God” who vanishes is the illusory “God” of those like Caiaphas (and us, if we are honest) who believe in a God whose power is coercive and vengeful to opponents or sinners.

### **Contemplating the Resurrected Jesus**

Facing the full impact of Jesus’ humiliating and painful death on the cross is the only way to experience the real joy of the Resurrection. In the final stage of the Spiritual Exercises, the Fourth Week, one asks to share the joy of Jesus resurrected from the dead, but the depth of that shared joy comes only after sharing with Jesus something of what he experienced in his crucifixion.

The risen Jesus tells the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). I take this not as an eternal decree of God, but as a statement that to be the Messiah he now is, he had to go through this suffering. He still has the wounds, even in glory; the horror is not undone by the Resurrection. Rather, with the Resurrection we find that his crucifixion and death are not the last word. Here is a magnificent sign of God’s forgiving love: God, in Jesus, received the worst

we humans could devise and did not retaliate by annihilating us. Even the worst we can do will not deter God from the desire to embrace us in friendship.

The joy of the Resurrection is that Jesus is alive and well, that God has raised him bodily from the dead, and that his resurrection will be ours. When you are given the grace to share in Jesus' joy through contemplation of the scenes of his resurrection, you can never despair, no matter what happens in your life, because you know in your bones that Jesus is risen and that you are one with him and will share in his resurrection.

If you have come this far in your friendship with Jesus, you now want to experience his joy, the joy he wants all his friends to share. Just as in the other stages of growth in friendship with Jesus, tell him of your desire to share his joy, to know him now in glory in order to love him more and be like him. Then contemplate some or all of the Gospel scenes of the Resurrection and let them touch your imagination. See what happens to you as you enter imaginatively into these stories of great joy after the harrowing loss of "God" experienced at the cross.

In the third book of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a scene that conveys something of the joy experienced by Jesus' disciples when the resurrected Jesus appeared to them. The realm of the Dark Lord Sauron has been destroyed, and against all hope the world has been saved, at least for the time being. Frodo, the hobbit, or halfling, and his faithful servant

and friend, Sam, have also been saved. Sam wakes up, smells wonderful perfumes, and sees Gandalf, the wizard he thought was dead. Sam says:

“Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What’s happened to the world?”

“A great Shadow has departed,” said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from his bed.

“How do I feel?” he cried. “Well, I don’t know how to say it. I feel, I feel”—he waved his arms in the air—“I feel like spring after winter, and sun on the leaves; and like trumpets and harps and all the songs I have ever heard!”

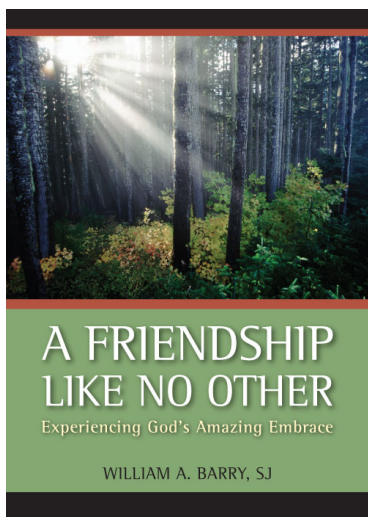
As you contemplate the scenes of Jesus’ appearance to his disciples, perhaps you will feel something akin to what Sam feels after his and Frodo’s desperate and seemingly fruitless journey to Mount Doom.

How are you feeling about your relationship with Jesus? Do you know him better and like him more? Does he know you

better and like to be with you? I was deeply moved during a province retreat when Kenneth Hughes, SJ, one of the retreat leaders, had us imagine someone meeting Jesus after death. The person says to Jesus, “I wish I had known you better in life.” Jesus replies, “I wish I had known you better.” Imagining that scene was life-changing for me.

I hope that through these contemplations on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus you have come to know him as a friend and have committed yourself to live according to his way of being human.

**A Friendship Like No Other**  
Experiencing God's Amazing Embrace  
**William A. Barry, SJ**

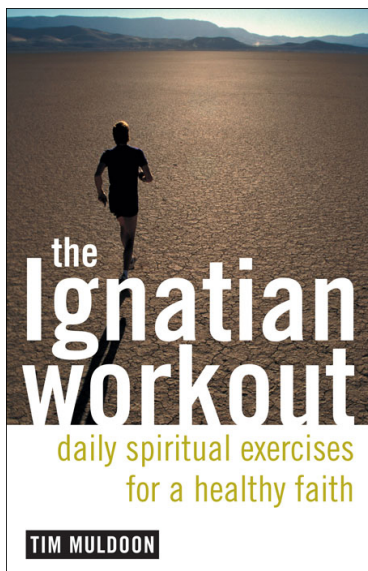


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# The Ignatian Workout

## Daily Exercises for a Healthy Faith

### Tim Muldoon



We all know the importance of physical exercise, but what about the spiritual exercises—those exercises that keep us fit spiritually? *The Ignatian Workout* promotes the importance of achieving spiritual fitness and presents a dynamic program of “work-outs” based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Designed for reading, reflection, and prayer, the book includes a brief history

of St. Ignatius and an overview of the Spiritual Exercises. Based on a 4-week program originally designed as a 30-day retreat, each week focuses on a different element of the mystery of the Christian faith. This unique guide to spiritual well-being concludes with a list of resources and Web sites for continued study.



Tim Muldoon is a theologian and a young adult formed through the practice of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola. For several years, he was the Chair of Religious Studies at Mount Aloysius College in Cresson, Pennsylvania. He currently serves as the Director of the Church in the 21st Century Center at Boston College. He is married with two young daughters.

### Other Books by Tim Muldoon

*Longing to Love*

## **What to Expect in Spiritual Workouts**

I find it interesting to be at a wedding or some other public ceremony when a minister or priest utters the words, “Let us pray.” Almost always, the room becomes quiet, heads bow, hands are folded, postures are straightened. It’s as if God won’t listen unless we behave like second-grade students on their best behavior when the teacher enters the room. What’s sometimes even funnier to me is that after this solemn exercise, sometimes people will resume telling off-color jokes, gossiping about so-and-so, or whatever. The implication: we have to be on our best behavior when God is around, but after we’ve dismissed God, we can get back to the fun!

I mention this observation to highlight that if we are going to pray in a way that isn’t deceiving to ourselves, then we have to have some basic ideas straight. We must, in other words, have some legitimate ideas about what we’re trying to do. Imagine a child learning that she is about to join a soccer league and wanting to make a good impression on the other kids. She tells her mom, “I’m going to practice soccer today so I can be as good as my friends.” Mom smiles and pats her daughter on the back and watches as the little girl goes out the door to practice. After an hour, the girl comes back into the house and announces proudly, “I’m going to be great, Mom! I can catch the soccer ball every time!” Mom realizes, with some chagrin, that the little girl has



been using her hands for the last hour to throw and catch a football, not a soccer ball.

Sometimes I think people's efforts at prayer are a little like this. They spend a great deal of effort at *something*, but that something may have very little to do with God. Their efforts come from misunderstandings, or partial understandings, or bad teaching, or whatever; and when they complain that they don't feel like anything is happening, they blame God and give up. This chapter will address the basic question of what prayer is like and what to expect when undertaking spiritual workouts. It will focus on five areas that Ignatius identified as important throughout his work: fundamentals, coaching, dedication, discernment, and the practice of finding God in all things.

## **Fundamentals**

### **Openness**

The single most common mistake people make in their spiritual lives is wanting God to follow their lead. Especially in a world in which we have so many demands, we feel an intense need to keep everything organized so as not to feel overwhelmed. Unfortunately, for many people, God fits into a neat little box that is opened only once in a while, whether it be on Sunday mornings or when reading or out enjoying nature. If we want to take God seriously, though, we must be the ones ready to follow *God's* lead. Gerard W. Hughes has it right when he writes about a

“God of surprises,” a person whose presence in our lives often calls us beyond the narrow limits of our expectations. We might, however, take comfort in the words of someone like Peter when Jesus first met him: “Leave me, Lord. I’m a sinner.” Initial reticence to pay attention to God’s invitation is not uncommon, for his call pulls us outside of the comfort zones we create for ourselves in a scary world. If we think about it, responding to God’s invitation should be something we want to do—as scary as it is, it is about trusting that God wants our ultimate good and believing that God is more capable than we are of leading us to it. According to the Gospels, God is intimately concerned about our well-being: God counts the hairs on our heads; seeks for us like a shepherd when we are lost; issues invitations to us to join in a feast; waits like a father for a lost son; holds us close like a mother with her baby. As a father, I find these parenting images especially meaningful, for they describe for me a God whose feelings for me are as profound as those I feel for my children.

Our posture toward God is often skewed because we work hard to create a life for ourselves in the midst of economic or social conditions that are not always helpful. To cite one example, my wife once shared with me that as a child, she was terrified of the idea of having to commit to a religious vocation—becoming a nun—because all the stories she had heard as a child about faith involved priests or nuns. As much as I respect those who have religious vocations (including a family

member, friends, and coworkers), I realize that this is only one of the many ways God calls people to live lives that reflect faith. As my wife grew older, she realized that religious life was not her vocation; she instead began to look at the specific characteristics and talents with which she could express her faith.

Some people seem to have the image that in order to follow God, they have to do something radically different than what they enjoy or do well. They are afraid to let God into the mainstream of their lives; they prefer to keep God on the periphery so as not to upset the careful balance. They wish to hold on to what they think is valuable about their lives, afraid of letting go of the things in their lives that help them to feel important: job, money, education, connections, whatever.

Addressing this situation, a priest friend of mine from Papua New Guinea once gave a sermon in which he told a parable of a man who loved living in his tropical paradise. Having been born on the island where his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents had always lived, he held in his heart a special place for the beauty of the palm trees, the white sand, the sloping mountains, the gentle climate. This man, approaching death, told his loved ones to place some island sand into each of his hands when he died, so that he might hold on to the memory of his beloved place forever. They did, and so the man proceeded to the gates of heaven still clutching the sand. At the gate, he was warmly greeted and told that as soon as he emptied

his hands of the sand, he could enter into eternal joy. The man was crushed, for he could not let go of what he loved so much, and so he waited. He waited, the parable goes, for a long, long time; so long that at last his hands grew weary and could no longer hold the sand. It eventually slipped through his fingers, lost forever. At that moment, Jesus came to him, holding the man as he sobbed at the loss of his memory, and said, “Come now, and enter into your rest.” With that, Jesus walked with the man through the gates of heaven, where before them both stretched out the entirety of the man’s beloved island.

The parable challenges us to consider what we hold on to that prevents us from turning our lives over to God, and whether it is indeed wise to try to seek our happiness apart from what God would help us to find. The fundamental posture of authentic prayer, Ignatius counsels, is that of openness to the will of God for our lives, for it is through that will that we will be led to our very reason for existing in the first place. In short, God knows our hearts better even than we do, and so when we pray, we ought to seek greater understanding of God’s will. To put it differently, our prayer must involve more than just asking for things that we’d like. While it is good to ask God for good things, as Jesus himself taught us to do (“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find” [Mt 7:7]), this is not the only way to pray. If we take seriously the idea that God is inviting us into a relationship based on love, then our prayer will nat-

urally involve things like appreciation (saying thanks) and praise but also, at times, resentment and anger. We fool ourselves if we think any relationship is always sweet and pleasant. What Jesus counseled was persistence in prayer, even during the times when it seems God is not listening.

There is a story Ignatius recounts in his autobiography that illustrates a kind of openness. It seems that after Ignatius recovered from his leg injury, he was having difficulty deciding what to do with his life. He resolved to travel to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage and began making plans. On the road to a place where he was to collect some money, he encountered someone who, in Ignatius's mind, defamed the Virgin Mary. Ignatius stewed over this encounter for some time, finding it hard to decide what to do about it. Ultimately, finding himself torn between chasing after the man and killing him, or continuing on his way in preparation for his pilgrimage (and after that, a life of penance), he resolved to let the mule he was riding on make the decision. Up ahead was a fork in the road: one direction took him toward where the man was staying, one in the other direction Ignatius was traveling. When the mule came to the fork in the road, he resolved, Ignatius would wait for the mule to decide which road to take. The mule took the road that did not lead to where the man was staying, and so Ignatius did not kill the man.

This story was for Ignatius a metaphor for the spiritual life. By that point in his life, he could recognize that the desire to kill

his traveling companion was not motivated by love of God, and yet the desire was still there. It was a remnant of what Ignatius later called a “disordered affection,” a skewed way of feeling about things in the world. Having grown up with the image of the knight as the supreme manifestation of manly virtue, Ignatius developed an emotional and psychological predisposition toward thinking of all things according to the standards of chivalry. Through his conversion experience, though, he recognized these standards as being different from God’s. Allowing the mule to make this formative decision in his life was tantamount to recognizing his own inadequacy to determine right from wrong.

An important prerequisite for doing spiritual workouts is openness: the sensibility that ultimately God is in charge and that whatever desires, ideas, fears, hopes, or expectations we bring into prayer might be transformed. It is bringing an open mind and heart into prayer, anticipating only that it will give me the freedom to change according to the ways that God wants me to change—not against my will but because of it. Like Ignatius, we may come to recognize that the things we think we want in life are, ultimately, of little value. We may come to a point when we can look back at our earlier life plans and laugh at our own ideas! This is clearly what happened to Ignatius as he was writing his autobiography. His mature outlook on life was very different from that of his youth.

In introducing his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius writes about them as follows:

The name “spiritual exercises” is given to any way we prepare or make ready our souls to get rid of our skewed feelings, and then once they are gone, to seek out and find God’s will for our lives and our ultimate good.

A regime of spiritual workouts is about giving ourselves the opportunity to form our lives based on what God wants for us, even if that may be different from what we have planned. For some, this idea may sound difficult; we don’t like the idea of giving up what we’ve done with our lives and running off to join a religious order. But what I’m trying to suggest is that whatever God wills for us will be the fulfillment of our deepest desires as human beings. True, some have been called and are called to change their lifestyles, like Ignatius did (or St. Paul before him), but many will simply be called to do what they are doing with renewed depth. We can take some comfort from the stories of saints who have been called into life-changing conversions, for again and again, what characterizes the life of trust in God is joy. God calls us into making our lives what they should be, clearing away the things that may have taken us off track. What Ignatius calls “skewed feelings” or “disordered affections” are really those things we *think* we like, based on our circumstances. A spiritual workout helps us to see them in a greater perspective; it helps us

to let go of the things we *think* we like so that we might be more free to attach ourselves to what gives us more permanent joy.

## **Honesty**

A second common problem people have with prayer is that they form elaborate ideas about what it's supposed to look like; and no matter what the circumstances are, they hold on to these ideas. Underlying the whole of Ignatius's writing is a sense of sobriety about the spiritual life, its demand for honesty on the part of the person doing the workouts. We cannot pretend that prayer is always going to put us in a peaceful mood or that we will leave it with a profound sense of having been touched by God. Sometimes prayer leaves us dry and weary; sometimes it makes us angry; other times it makes us feel terribly alone. It is important to acknowledge these feelings, while not concluding that they mean God doesn't love us. Early on especially, people for whom formal prayer is new may feel like nothing is happening. It is important not to pretend in our prayer, for only by acknowledging what we feel can we make any sort of progress.

When I coached collegiate rowing, I came across many great people who were also very dedicated athletes. They wanted to prove themselves able to perform the workouts I assigned and show that they could handle the stresses on their bodies. They saw workouts as challenges to be overcome and wanted to prove to themselves that they could do whatever was necessary to make fast boats. I found that novice rowers especially



were unlikely to tell me about any problems they were having, because they didn't want to appear weak or incompetent to me or to their friends on the team. So, often, they would simply ignore problems. After a time, I learned to look for telltale signs: fatigue, stress, lowering interest levels; and so I learned to ask questions about their experiences in training. In many cases, the difficulties were due to simple technical errors (like the placement of the hands on the oar) that, if addressed directly, could lead to more-efficient performance. Often, I had to coax out their problems: "What do you feel? Where does it hurt?" If they told me what was going on, most times I could help them address the problem.

A similar dynamic takes place in our spiritual lives. If we assume everything is supposed to go smoothly all the time, frustration can set in the first time we feel different from the way we expect to feel. Being honest in our workouts means, first, acknowledging when we are finding them difficult or pointless. Often, this is simply a reflection of how our expectations are not matching the reality of the situation. Coupled with a sense of openness, honesty can allow us to recognize problems but deal with them in a more fluid way.

I'd like to share an analogy from rowing that I find helpful here. A key to rowing well is to have a certain flexibility about what is going on. On any given day, the water could be choppy, the wind could be strong, the current could be fast—all of these

things affect how a person or crew feels in a boat. Novice rowers often make the mistake of trying too hard under these different circumstances to keep the boat in perfect balance: they hold the oar handles with white knuckles, muscling through the strokes in an attempt to keep moving smoothly. What invariably happens, though, is that the boat (which is narrow and thus hard to balance) tips from side to side, even for crews who are experienced. If someone is gripping the oar handle too tightly, it can tip the boat even more wildly; the oar acts like a pole striking the water, pushing the boat down to the other side. Good coaches know to counsel their crews to stay relaxed, to allow the boat to tip slightly from side to side, but to focus on what is more important: keeping it moving fast. Instead of gripping the oars tightly, people should stay relaxed and absorb whatever tips should happen.

What I find illustrative about this metaphor is that it suggests something about expectations and effort. When our expectations are wrong, our effort sometimes has to increase; we can grow tired more quickly and sense that things are not going well. On the other hand, if our expectations are legitimate, we will often find that problems that arise do not bother us as much; we simply adapt to whatever comes our way. In prayer, this attitude can be helpful. Instead of trying with every ounce of energy to do prayer the way we think we should (good posture, pleasant words, a saintly smile on our faces), we can instead try to be real-

istic. We should expect that sometimes “waves” will come our way—life situations that make it hard to pray—but we can still keep our focus on a more long-term understanding of the spiritual life. It is important to allow ourselves to change our work-outs, based on the varying circumstances of our lives.

In my own life, this point was hard to learn. I had developed the practice of formal prayer during college, having learned from the Jesuits at the institutions where I studied. After a time, it felt like I had achieved a certain rhythm, and I felt confident that the methods I had learned would sustain me throughout my life. Yes, there were life changes; moves, changes of jobs, marriage, and just growing up had effects on my prayer life. But I was able to adapt and more or less maintain a prayer life in spite of those changes.

But then came children! Life circumstances became very different, and I found myself having real difficulty with prayer. My wife and I encountered a long process of struggle that finally led to the adoption of our first daughter. As I look back over the last couple of years, I realize how much of my problems in prayer came as a result of not dealing honestly with these struggles. I had developed a certain expectation about my spiritual life over my college and single years, and this expectation may have hindered me somewhat when my life changed. I could not pray the way I used to; I probably will never again pray the way I used to. This is not to say what I did then was wrong; rather, it is to

recognize that I am now a different person. Fortunately for me, a caring spiritual director helped me to understand this (I'll discuss spiritual direction more in the next section). It took a long time to honestly confront what was going on; my own unwillingness to confront God under difficult circumstances hindered my ability to pray at all.

The spiritual life involves highs and lows, periods of what Ignatius called “consolation” (comfort) and “desolation” (despair). We cannot pretend that prayer is always going to make us happy at the moment any more than we can pretend that life experiences will. Our spiritual lives, to state the obvious, are *our lives*—with all the attendant joy and grief that come with them. In order to construct our lives well, we must not fool ourselves with false images. The biblical term that is relevant here is *idolatry*, idol worship: the practice of making God into something more manageable. It is very easy to fall into idolatry because we all want to have control of the circumstances of our lives and to make God fit into the place we have assigned. Sometimes we need someone to tell us when we are doing this, because we can tend to be blind to the ways we do it ourselves. For this reason, Ignatius suggests that we need guides.

## Coaching

Any serious athlete knows that training alone is often a bad idea. Since we can't actually watch ourselves perform, the only feedback we can have as individuals is through reflecting on what we

are doing at the moment or thinking about it afterward. This practice of self-reflection is very important, to be sure; but it is inadequate. We need someone with an outside perspective who can tell us what we're doing well and what we're doing wrong, who can suggest ideas about how to get better.

This is especially true for novices. The first time a person tries a new sport, she is awkward and unused to the new physical demands, whether they include shooting a basket, running fast, or hitting a ball. A good coach will take a person's interest and provide encouragement and hints for how to improve, recognizing that the person's ego is still a bit fragile. Recently I participated in a "learn to row" day at our boathouse, when dozens of people showed up for the first time to have a try at what they considered a new and interesting activity. I'm always interested in helping out at events like these because I find it refreshing to meet people who want to try something new and are willing to feel a little silly as they get started. I've been involved in rowing, both as an athlete and as a coach, for over a dozen years; so it's nice to meet people who look at it with fresh eyes. I find that I, too, can learn something from them about what motivates them to try in the first place.

I was on the other side of this experience recently. I was at the beach and decided to try surfing. I met a man in his fifties who was the surf coach—he had been doing it for many years, and his attitude was contagious. In a short while, he was able not

only to teach me the mechanics of riding waves but also to convey a real enthusiasm and love for the sport. On that first day, I walked away feeling as though I had learned something and looked forward to being able to try it again.

Prayer, like anything, takes time to learn. Good coaches help us to channel our enthusiasm in ways that make us look forward to doing it well. They can help us to avoid frustration by making sure we get off to the right start. Christian spirituality has recognized the value of tradition as an authoritative guide, a kind of coach for the spiritual life. Ignatius himself, though he was an innovator in some respects, did not really invent any new forms of prayer. On the contrary, he used what he considered to be useful guides for his own prayer life and adapted them to fit the needs of his situation. Today we are wise to follow his example by appealing to sources of spirituality that have some grounding in long-standing practice.

One obvious example is participation in a worshiping community. Sadly, many today who are interested in spirituality don't follow through with this step, which is necessary if we are to avoid deceiving ourselves. Spirituality cannot be a solitary endeavor; it must be grounded in the life of a community, or else it becomes little more than an isolated and ineffective version of self-help. Spirituality that is grounded in community is like the house built on rock that Jesus described (Mt 7:24); it is less likely to be blown away by the winds of change that inevitably

move through our lives. When our spirituality arises from our participation in community, several things happen. First, we are challenged to see our prayer as one part of the larger exercise of living the Christian life, for we must apply our prayer to the ordinary problems of living with other people. This prevents us from treating spirituality solely as a private exercise. We will be in a position to encourage others in tough times; in turn, they can help us to persevere in periods of spiritual dryness. Second, participation in community worship means we will be confronting ideas that make us uncomfortable, pushing us outside of the natural comfort zones we develop in our spiritual lives. This point, I think, is difficult but important. It's easy to fall into patterns that must change as we grow. Third, we will begin to see our own spiritual lives in some perspective, by seeing the struggles and issues of people who are both younger and older than us. Seeing what younger people confront can make us cognizant of how we have grown; seeing what older people confront can make us cognizant of how much more we must still grow. Considering the spiritual journeys of people around us can help us to navigate the changes we, too, encounter. My hope is that as people come to see church as a place where people help each other grow in their spiritual lives, it might be transformed.

Ignatius understood that all Christians are called to practice the spiritual life in community but some are called further to deepen their relationship with God through more concerted

efforts. As far back as the earliest centuries of Christian life, there are examples of men and women who elected to turn their backs on the society of their youth and devote themselves wholeheartedly to God. Some went literally empty-handed into the desert, where they practiced a kind of spiritual athleticism: subduing their minds and bodies through the constant practice of prayer. Over the centuries, we encounter stories of people whose spiritual practices sound astonishing, even absurd; the common bond is that these people sought a deeper knowledge of God by relinquishing all things that might distract them. As noted earlier, Ignatius himself was enthralled by stories of spiritual athleticism, for it attracted the part of him that wanted to be better than anyone else. Later, it seems, he came to realize that there was a somewhat selfish motive in this attraction; but the core idea of devoting himself wholly to God was what impelled him in his vocation. He wisely recognized, though, that in order to pursue it, he needed the help of those who had themselves already been practicing their spirituality for some time.

An important part of his *Spiritual Exercises*, therefore, focuses on the role of the spiritual director, the person who acts as a kind of coach to the person seeking to understand the will of God. Today there are people all over the world who are trained in this capacity; many are involved in retreat centers and can help even people who have never prayed formally. (At the end of



this book, there is a list of such retreat centers, which interested people can contact for further information on finding spiritual direction.)

The role of the spiritual director is to help a person see through his or her biases in order to more clearly know the will of God. He or she does not lecture or teach but, rather, helps the person see more clearly the movements of God in prayer. Teresa of Ávila, a mystic who lived at about the same time as Ignatius, wrote that in a good spiritual director, knowledge is more important than piety. In other words, a director is someone who has studied prayer and who (like many athletic coaches) is sometimes better at teaching others to do it than doing it personally. The bottom line is that spiritual direction is a skill different from prayer itself, for it involves understanding something about the way God communicates to people in prayer and the way people are likely to respond.

In this book I do not presuppose that you have immediate access to spiritual direction, but I encourage anyone who is interested in furthering his or her prayer life to consider it. What I do suggest, however, is that you not treat spirituality as something you can learn completely on your own. No one can run a marathon without someone to train her; no one can dig deeply into prayer without a spiritual director. In the earliest days of the church, we see that certain people were called to be spiritual leaders, people who had internalized the words and actions

of Jesus and could communicate them to other people. From these times onward, it became clear that seeking God involved more than just good intentions—it also involved learning from those who had themselves already advanced on “the Way,” as Christianity was first called in apostolic times. Today those who devote themselves to professional ministry are the inheritors of that tradition, and in my experience, they like nothing better than helping out someone who is truly interested in knowing the will of God.

## **Dedication**

One of the unpleasant tasks I had to perform as a coach was to keep my athletes motivated to do the work they needed in order to compete at a high level. Often this took the form of cajoling or even threatening them to finish a workout—not in a sadistic way, of course, but with the understanding that when people get tired, they can sometimes get sloppy. Under these circumstances, it was very important for me to understand what workouts feel like: weariness, lack of motivation, and other factors can inhibit people from doing what they know they are capable of doing.

The hardest time to motivate athletes to do their work is after a difficult loss. At low points, people naturally start to ask questions about whether all the hard work pays off; and sometimes it's hard to come up with an answer. At such moments, the trust

that teams have built over the course of the season becomes crucial, for without it the project would collapse.

Like anything else in life, prayer will involve highs and lows. We all know that it's easy to continue doing something when it makes us happy; but the opposite is true when it makes us depressed. But, as I suggested earlier, expectations are important: if a team absolutely refuses to believe that they can ever lose, then the first time they do lose will be particularly difficult. Realistically, it's important to understand (even with a hard-line, motivating "no lose" attitude) that there are going to be setbacks in any endeavor worth devoting energy to, so that when these setbacks occur, they can be seen as part of the larger picture. In the case of prayer, the larger picture involves consolation and desolation: periods when God's love and care seem obvious, and periods when God seems totally absent and unconcerned. In the times of desolation, Ignatius's counsel is clear: don't change anything. Stick to whatever resolutions you made during the period of consolation. And during consolation, moreover, we should think about how our resolutions will affect us during the next period of desolation.

As a college athlete, I was impressed by the counsel one coach gave me about doing workouts: he said that as long as you do each one with as much intensity as you can, then on race day, you will have no regrets about your preparation. So I became accustomed to working as hard as I could every day, sometimes

doing double workouts just so I could be sure I was giving everything I had. On certain days, especially in the middle of a dismal winter, I would have vastly preferred doing any number of other things: hanging out with friends, seeing a movie, going out, whatever. But every night, even on Fridays when everyone else seemed to be doing something interesting, I would head off to bed early so I could make the 5 A.M. wake-up and get to my workouts. There were times when I thought I was crazy to make such sacrifices, especially when we had some pretty disappointing results during race season. But I am still moved by the feeling of having no regrets, even in a losing cause—there's something about knowing that you tried as hard as possible to be your best.

Confronting the reality of highs and lows in any endeavor is hard, but unless we do it, chances are we will not succeed. How many people do you know who have made New Year's resolutions that lasted only a short time? Usually, people have great intentions that eventually fade because other life concerns choke them off. Confronting the reality of desolation in our prayer lives can help us take a realistic, farsighted view of what to expect: sometimes prayer will be boring or difficult or painful. But it is still worth doing. I am convinced that the twentieth-century monk and spiritual guide Thomas Merton was right when he wrote in a well-known prayer that our desire to know God is important to God, even when we don't particularly

understand what is going on. Dedication in our prayer lives means simply that we expect periods of consolation and desolation, and that we do not place unrealistic demands on what prayer is supposed to feel like. Yes, sometimes it makes us feel good; it can bring us to periods of intense contemplation; it can help us to know God's loving care; it can confront us with the sheer beauty of creation. And it is wonderful when those things happen! But they are not the *reason* for prayer. Deepening our relationship with God is the reason, and so, as in any other relationship, we must be prepared to experience low points. Abandoning anything when it becomes difficult may prevent us from growing as human beings; abandoning prayer when it seems worthless may prevent us from knowing how God is changing us during these periods. Again, good coaching helps us to gain perspective on the low points in our spiritual lives, to understand that sometimes the greatest spiritual growth occurs at those times when we feel distant from God.

As I look back over my prayer life of the last decade or so, it is clear to me that times of desolation are necessary, not unlike periods of sleep in our daily lives or periods when fields lie fallow. In these examples, it seems to us like nothing is happening; but these periods make possible the growth that we can later see and understand. If we allow ourselves to prepare for the fact that sometimes desolation happens, we can give ourselves the chance to trust that God is preparing us for a more mature relationship

when we are ready. It may be helpful to consider the example of Jesus on the cross: his moment of utter desolation led him to cry out to God, “Why have you abandoned me?” But as we know, that was not the last chapter in his story.

## **Discernment**

Ignatius counseled that the key to the spiritual life, listening to God’s will, is *discernment*. Discernment is a process in which we look at the different experiences we encounter in prayer and distinguish what is leading us toward God from what is leading us away from God.

Earlier I described how athletes must learn to distinguish good pain from bad pain. This may be a helpful starting point to think about discernment; we learn the practice through continued effort over time by asking questions about the effects of different experiences. An important theme in discernment is that it must involve more than just an immediate reaction to our prayer. As noted above, sometimes we will encounter painful times. Discernment helps us to understand how on occasion we must confront pain in order to grow, but it also helps us to recognize the times when the pain is too much for us and we must seek help.

In our time, sciences like psychology, sociology, neurobiology, and others have made us much more conscious of the different factors that affect our attitude toward life. Even on an intuitive level, though, most people understand how things like the

weather, job stress, relationships, health, and other factors can make an impact on our spiritual lives. There are some days when everything seems to go wrong; it's hard for me not to get mad at God under such circumstances. While Ignatius was not trained in the modern sciences, he did nevertheless have what we would call today a keen psychological insight. He did understand how spirituality is tied up with these other factors, and so his rules for discernment are about trying to get a sense of what one is facing in prayer. To use an obvious example, imagine that you've got the flu, you've just learned that you are about to be down-sized at work, and your significant other has announced that the relationship is over. What will your prayer be like, assuming you decide to do it at all? Honestly, if it were my situation, I would probably think about some choice words for God and skip the prayer altogether!

If I practice discernment, though, I realize that this attitude tells me about how I presently view God: I'm ready to pray when things are okay but then blame God for any problems that creep up. I try to keep in mind that when I am angry at God, I still need to pray and allow time for God to change me. It's not something I enjoy, but I do it because I trust that in the long run, it will make me more conscious of God's will.

With the help of a guide, one who practices discernment will learn to recognize those movements in prayer that call a person to spiritual growth. But a person may also recognize those

factors that truly inhibit spirituality. Just as a good counselor can help a person understand psychological problems, a director can help a person understand when prayer is not the answer to problems. It's important to recognize that there are legitimate blocks to prayer and that for some people, it will be necessary to seek the help of other professionals. Discernment is not a perfect solution to all the things that make life difficult; it is, rather, a specific practice within the context of one's prayer life that can help a person to grow.

To use an analogy, think of discernment as an athlete's physical self-consciousness. One thing I enjoy about rowing in an eight-person boat is that I can become so focused on performing well that I can forget about everything else that's going on in my world. I developed the habit of bringing an almost meditative attention to my form—paying careful attention to every movement of the hands, every stretch of the back, every sensation on the oar handle, every drive with the legs. Over time, I have become able to recognize if something is slightly off: perhaps my hands are a bit too high, perhaps my shoulders are slumping a little, perhaps my timing is out of sync with the other rowers. Usually, I can make small adjustments so that the general feeling in the boat improves. I have, in short, developed a level of self-consciousness that enables me to look for signs that something is wrong. Discernment is like this; over time, people



become accustomed to looking for those things that hinder the ability to pray well, so they can seek solutions.

But to take the analogy a step further, imagine that one day a coach is out watching me in the boat and notices that there is a pronounced problem in some aspect of my rowing. The coach, remember, is able to see me in a way that my self-consciousness cannot—he or she can point out problems that may lie outside the scope of my discernment process. Further, sometimes the problems people encounter are not directly related to the activity at hand. If, for example, my coach tells me that my hands are not working smoothly, I might respond that it's because I'm feeling some pain in my wrist. Perhaps it's a minor problem that can be corrected with better form, but perhaps it's due to a medical problem like tendinitis. In the latter case, no amount of discernment on my part will help; I need to seek medical attention. The bottom line is that while discernment is an important practice to bring to the larger picture of the spiritual life, it must be complemented by the understanding that sometimes our spiritual problems are manifestations of problems that need attention outside the realm of prayer.

Ignatius offers several ideas about how to practice discernment that a person can develop more and more over time. The first one involves paying attention to the ways that we make destructive choices in our lives. It's easy to get caught up in choices that bring us only temporary happiness, because our cul-

ture is saturated with them. The entertainment industry thrives because we choose them again and again; like candy, they give us a little pleasure for a short time. But candy isn't enough to live on, and so the person who has nothing but candy will, in the long run, be in bad shape. If we get stuck in the pattern of choosing only these temporary pleasures, we can find ourselves unable to get out of the pattern—we become slaves to our unsatiated desire. Our desire, like that of a person who drinks salt water, grows stronger even as we take in what seems to satisfy it.

Under these circumstances, people find that conscience enters the picture. It's often depicted as the angel on the shoulder, telling the person, "Don't eat that chocolate cake! It's bad for you!" Meanwhile, the little devil on the other shoulder says, "Don't listen to that little fairy! Go ahead, live a little!" Not a very good depiction, I must say, since it makes conscience seem like a wet blanket. On a more serious note, people sometimes describe conscience as the part that makes them feel guilty about things, the part that prevents them from really enjoying themselves. It's important to think of conscience as the part of us that discerns the will of God. In other words, when our conscience stings, perhaps it's because God is trying to get our attention. Notice that in this case, the pain of a guilty conscience may be a kind of good pain, calling us to ask questions about the choices we make in life.

As I suggested earlier, though, discernment doesn't happen all at once, and so it is also good to be careful when dealing with guilt. True, sometimes guilt is a call to make different choices about our lives; but other times it may be the result of more deep-seated problems that really are better handled with professional help.

A second idea about discernment applies to people who have decided that they need to make some changes in their lives. Usually, tough decisions, like quitting smoking, take time; people wrestle with the issue before they come to a resolution. There can be obstacles to making a decision, even if a person knows it's the right one. Reasons that to an outside observer seem small can loom large in the mind of the person wrestling with the decision. Discernment under these circumstances is about getting a certain perspective, recognizing that the end result, and not the difficulties along the way, must be a person's focus.

A third key idea about discernment relates to consolation and desolation. Consolation is an increase of faith, hope, and love, giving the person interior peace, while desolation is exactly the opposite. Discernment over the long term is about recognizing how the spiritual life involves both of these at different times and choosing those things in our lives that ultimately lead to more faith, hope, and love.

There is a more positive aspect to discernment. At certain times in our lives, we are faced with more than one good option

and have to choose which is the best. I may have to decide whether to go to college or begin work; to get married to someone I love or move to begin a new career; to welcome another child into the family or settle into a permanent lifestyle with the children I already have. In these cases, discernment is not about choosing right from wrong but, rather, about choosing one good over another. These kinds of decisions can be the most difficult precisely because all the options seem good. For Ignatius, the key is the same: which decision allows me to truly become what God is continually creating me to be, in every moment of my life? Which decision makes me most true to myself, the deepest self, where I find God? How do I respond to God's invitation to cooperate in God's constant project of building the real me?

### **God in All Things**

Developing the practice of spirituality enables one to grow in the ability to see God in all things. Ignatian spirituality is pervaded by this sense of God's presence in all of creation, which means that anything in human experience can be a source for prayer. People unfamiliar with prayer tend to think of it as something you have to do in a church or some other holy place, with hands folded and head bowed. On the contrary, if spirituality is about the ongoing conversation between the person and God, then it can take place at any moment of the day under any circumstances.

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89) wrote what I think is the best reflection of this theme, in “God’s Grandeur”:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell:  
the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah!  
bright wings.

I love the image of the Holy Spirit enfolding the world in her wings, caring for it the way that a mother holds her baby close. It speaks of a tenderness that God brings to us, even in the most dismal conditions. Writing during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, Hopkins was aware of the difficult conditions in which many people lived at the time. His reference to every-

thing being “seared with trade” points to the way that people can cover up the beauty of creation, immersing ourselves in the commercial world, which can seem so dehumanizing. And yet, he writes, there is still the hint of God everywhere—the “dearest freshness deep down things,” as he calls it—suggesting that if we look beyond this world that constantly assaults our senses, we can come to know God’s presence.

In Catholic theology, this vision that extends beyond the everyday world toward God is called “sacramental.” Developing a sacramental worldview means that we are able to look at the ordinary things in everyday life and ask how God self-reveals through them. To use a personal example, I often marvel at my students, many of whom overcome significant odds in order to attain a college degree. At times, their desire to do well means that they wish to challenge the way I’ve graded a paper or assignment, and sometimes I have to confront their anger. Under some circumstances, confronting a person’s anger makes me defensive: you push, I push back. But I’ve come to see even expressions of anger as arising out of what I think are very holy desires: a better life for oneself and one’s family. So even when a student expresses her anger at me, sometimes I can detect a hint of the work of God moving that student toward her goal.

Seeing God in all things is about challenging the concepts we have formed about God over the course of our lives, recognizing that they are always limited. Part of the way we as human beings

think is to break down our world into manageable chunks; we develop a sense of how things work based on what we are able to understand. If God is God, though, our understanding of God will always be very limited. We must be prepared always to challenge what we have previously thought about God and allow God to challenge us to think in a new way. When we allow ourselves this kind of open-eyed wonder at the world, rather than assuming we've got it all figured out, we will begin to be surprised. God will begin showing up everywhere! The English mystic Juliana of Norwich wrote a well-known reflection on a hazelnut, in which she saw the whole of God's creation. This simple little nut became for her a point of insight into God! In our own time, Mother Teresa wrote about how she saw the face of Jesus in the dying poor of Calcutta. These two examples tell us something about the sacramental worldview: *what* we see is less important than the *way* we see it. The whole world can be a moment for discerning God's face, if we are ready to see it.

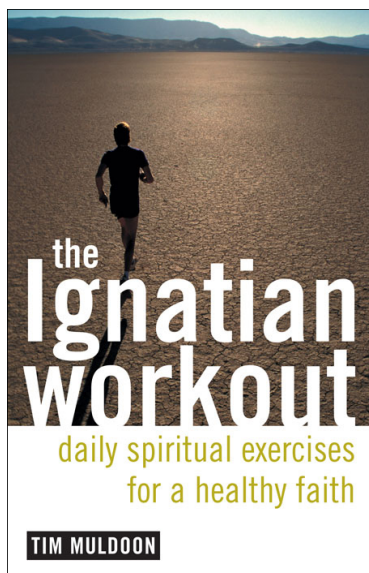
Too often, it seems, people are looking for God in the big things: great miracles, epic moments, noble causes. We prefer to think of God as the one who parted the Red Sea and did other great deeds. But we do well to think also about the example of Jesus, whose way of manifesting the love of God was simple: one-on-one conversations, oral teaching, compassionate action. He did not always seek the "big things," if we think of them in the political or social sense. What he sought was connectedness

to other people in order to teach them about how great God's love for them is. Jesus' God is the God of the story about the prophet Elijah, who looked for God in a strong wind, an earthquake, and fire—but found God instead in a tiny whispering sound (1 Kgs 19:11–13). God shatters our illusions, our concepts, and so if we use them to look for God, then we will be disappointed. But if we simply allow God to self-reveal as God wills, then we will begin to see the hand of God in all things.

To conclude, I am suggesting that if we are to undertake spiritual workouts, we must have a good idea of what to expect. And what Jesus teaches us is that God wants to love us and to be loved in return through the way we love other people in our lives. Our posture in prayer, then, must be one of openness to whatever ways God moves in our lives. We must listen, wait, watch, and be ready for God; we must be vigilant. We must be ready to encounter God in ways that we had not expected, by honestly acknowledging the situations in our lives from which we begin our prayer. We must be ready for correction in order to know the ways we have set up blocks to God in our ways of thinking. We must be prepared to encounter difficulty, both from life circumstances and from our own tendencies toward sin. We must be ready to learn the process of discernment in order that, over time, we may come to find traces of God everywhere.



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# What Is Ignatian Spirituality?

David L. Fleming, SJ

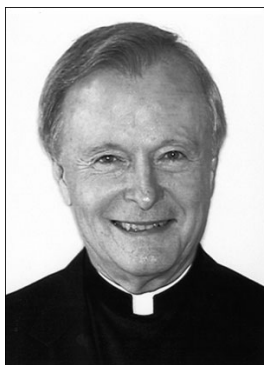


WHAT IS IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY?  
DAVID FLEMING, SJ



In *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* St. Ignatius and the key elements of his teachings are brought to life by David Fleming, SJ. This highly accessible summary of the key elements of the spirituality of St. Ignatius includes a look at contemplative prayer, discernment, and what it means to be actively involved in service and mission. In 20 concise chapters,

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David L. Fleming, SJ, is internationally known for his conferences, retreats, and writings on Ignatian spirituality, spiritual direction, and the spiritual life. He is the editor of the journal *Review for Religious*. His books include *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, *Like the Lightning*, and *Prisms for a Christ-Life*.

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*Qué es la espiritualidad ignaciana?*

## A Spirituality of the Heart

In the exercise the Call of the King, Ignatius says that there are two responses to God's call. One response comes from the reasonable person. The second response is from the generous or magnanimous person. We might call it the response of the heart.

Ignatius prefaced his Spiritual Exercises with twenty notes that explain the purpose of his exercises and offer advice and counsel to the director who is guiding the retreat. The very first of these “preliminary helps” explains what he means by *spiritual* exercises. Physical exercise tunes up the body and promotes good health. Spiritual exercise, he writes, is good for “strengthening and supporting us in the effort to respond ever more faithfully to the love of God.”

Note what Ignatius did not say. He did not say that the Spiritual Exercises are designed primarily to deepen our understanding or to strengthen our will. He did not promise to explain spiritual mysteries to us or enlighten our minds. We may emerge from the Exercises with enhanced intellectual understanding, but this is not the goal. The goal is a response—a certain kind of response. Ignatius is after a response of the heart.

“Heart” does not mean the emotions (though it includes our emotions). It refers to our inner orientation, the core of our being. This kind of “heart” is what Jesus was referring to when he told us to store up treasures in heaven instead

of on earth, “for where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” (Matthew 6:21) This is the “heart” Jesus was worried about when he said “from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy.” (Matthew 15:19) Jesus observed that our heart can get untethered from our actions: “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Matthew 15:8) Heart in this sense—the totality of our response—is the concern of the Spiritual Exercises.

This is the ancient meaning of “heart” in biblical usage, but we actually retain traces of this meaning in contemporary English. When we say to someone “my heart goes out to you,” we mean something more than a feeling of concern. If said sincerely, it communicates a sense of solidarity with someone. It means more than “I understand” (our intellect). It means more than “I sympathize” (our feelings). It means something like, “I stand with you in this.” It is an expression of a fundamental choice.

Today we commonly say about someone who shows no enthusiasm for a project that “his heart isn’t in it.” We usually say this when people behave in a way that is at odds with their deepest desires. We say it about ourselves when we hurt people that we love and do things that we know are at odds with who we really are. This “heart” is what Ignatius is concerned with.

We might think about Ignatian spirituality as a way of getting our hearts in the right place.

Ignatius understood this because that is what happened to him. He underwent a profound conversion while recuperating from his wounds, but it was not a conversion of the intellect or will. Before his conversion—and afterward—he was a thoroughly orthodox Catholic who followed the religious practices expected of him. That was not what changed. His conversion involved his deepest desires and commitments, that essential center of the personality in which man stands before God. His religious practice and intellectual understanding deepened over time, but it was his heart that was transformed.

Over years of prayerful reflection and spiritual direction of others, Ignatius developed many ways to listen to the language of the heart. This is the language that reveals God's intentions and inspires us to a generous response. What we believe and what we do are important. But Ignatius is far more interested in the condition of our hearts.

Still, most of us face a persistent temptation to make the Spiritual Exercises or any kind of spiritual renewal a matter of changing the way we think. Indeed, this danger arises even in a book like this, which sets forth ideas and concepts and principles to broaden our understanding of Ignatian spirituality. It is vital to realize that understanding is not the goal. We can understand a great number of things, but this may not affect the way

we live our lives. The goal is a response of the heart, which truly changes the whole person.

God taught Ignatius about the heart through several mystical visions he received early in his spiritual formation. One such vision came upon him at a time when he was questioning whether he should say three or four prayers to our Trinitarian God—a prayer directed to each Person, Father, Son, and Spirit, and then a fourth prayer to the One God. He was praying outside on the steps of a monastery when he suddenly “heard” God the Trinity as the musical sound of three organ keys playing simultaneously. Another time he received a vision of God the creator as “something white out of which rays were coming.” Out of this whiteness God created light. “He did not know how to explain these things,” he writes of himself in the third person. But Ignatius responded with his heart: “This was accompanied with so much tears and so much sobbing that he could not restrain himself.”

This heart response is a cornerstone of the Spiritual Exercises. Creation is a flow of God’s gifts, with a human response being the link that allows the flow to return to God. The human response is a free choice to allow God’s creation to speak. Creation helps us to know and love God and to want to live with God forever.

Early in the Exercises, Ignatius asks the retreatant to pray before Jesus Christ on the cross. He identifies Christ as creator,

the God of the Principle and Foundation. “Talk to him about how he creates because he loves,” Ignatius seems to say. This is no abstract God of reason, but a loving God seen in the face of Jesus Christ. It is the Pauline Christ of Colossians and Ephesians. It is the Christ of the Prologue to John’s Gospel: the Word “in whom all things were created.” This is the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega of John’s Apocalypse.

Our spiritual journey is an attempt to answer the question, “What is life all about?” Here is Ignatius’s answer: a vision of God for our hearts, not our minds. It is a depiction of the Creator as a superabundant giver. He gives gifts that call forth a response on our part, a free choice to return ourselves to him in grateful thanks and love. It is a vision that only a heart can respond to.



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*The Spiritual Exercises, the Autobiography of Ignatius Loyola, and the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* are cited by the standard paragraph numbers. Quotations from these sources have been taken from:

*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. George E. Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992). Abbreviated Spiritual Exercises throughout.

*A Pilgrim's Testament: The Memoirs of Ignatius of Loyola, As Faithfully Transcribed by Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, trans. Parmananda R. Divarkar (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995). Abbreviated Autobiography throughout.

*The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. George E. Ganss (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970). Abbreviated Constitutions throughout.

With additional citations from:

*Jesuit*, Joseph H. Fichter, S.J. and James Laynez (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1944).

*The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice, a Historical Study*, Joseph de Guibert, S.J., ed. George E. Ganss, S.J., trans. William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1964).

*The Managerial Mystique: Restoring Leadership in Business*, Abraham Zaleznik (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

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Jacket and interior design by Megan Duffy Rostan

The photo of Ignatius Loyola is from the Curia Generalizi of the Society of Jesus.

*Just Call Me López*

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### *The Ignatian Adventure*

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### *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer*

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### *A Friendship Like No Other*

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"How Jesus Saw Himself," N. T. Wright, *Bible Review* 12, no. 3 (1996).

*On Christian Theology*; Rowan Williams (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

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### *The Ignatian Workout*

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*What Is Ignatian Spirituality?*

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