

0 | A Search for Spirituality

A consideration of spirituality

Enrichment Version

The Enrichment Version is designed for those who wish to explore spirituality from a New Testament perception without the intention of pursuing either a certificate or a degree. This syllabus is identical to the one used by credit and degree-track students, except Internet articles, videos, listings of secondary resources, exams, and writing assignments have been deleted. There is nothing to submit for professorial review or grading. Yet, a person may glean a substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of spirituality through this guide. Therefore, the Enrichment syllabus is available for downloading without cost. Interested parties may glean a substantial knowledge, comprehension, and understanding of defining features of biblical spirituality.

The course defines spirituality in the context of reality and makes application that reflects the Christian worldview. It is organized in five modules: (1) The Concept of Spirituality, (2) A Sense of the Sacred, (3) Spirituality Actualized, (4) A Spiritual Community, and (5) The Spiritual Life.

Objectives

- Explain spirituality in terms of faith, reason, and emotion.
- Analyze the life of the spiritual person within the spiritual community.
- Evaluate how a spiritual person applies ethical principles to all aspects of his/her life.

Course Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, the student will be able to

1. Recognize the foundational assumptions and concepts embraced by the term “spirituality.”
2. Analyze the relationship of faith and reason.
3. Formulate the components of sacred functions.

A Letter of Introduction

Perhaps no subject is as worthy of exploration as spirituality. Not only can the search have eternal value, it holds the potential for finding contentment and fulfillment in this life. The joy that fills the soul from a personal relationship with God has no equal.

As you will soon discover, the course is laid out as a journey. Like any journey, you may find this one frustrating at times. You will surely challenge some assertions. If so, consider them as obstacles in the road. You may choose to contend with the obstacles, or you may wish to go around them. Whatever your

decision, know that the goal of the course is not full agreement with the text of the syllabus. The goal is truth upon which one may act in a responsible manner.

Somewhere along the journey, you may entertain the thought that the journey has no purpose for you. To turn back prematurely could be quite costly, for you will never know what lies ahead until you reach your destination. Indeed, the trip is fast paced. Perhaps we are asking too much at one time. Nevertheless, you will gain a perspective about what the Christian life entails. If you grow discouraged along the way, remember that we are here for you. Your first line of contact is with your advisor, who will become known to you shortly. If the advisor finds your questions to be beyond the scope of his/her qualifications to answer, the advisor will refer your e-mail to me for personal attention.

In this introductory course, you will be introduced to biblical scripture in a positive manner. Let the journey begin. God bless you as you explore.

Procedure

1. The course has five modules. The modules are progressive in nature, so begin your study with Module one.
2. As you proceed, you will be prompted to move through new stages in your journey.
3. Reflection exercises are found in each module. These reflections are for your benefit.
4. You may consider keeping a journal of your "spiritual" activities. The journal may include prayers, reflection, meditation themes on what spirituality means to you and how this course is influencing your spirituality.

Things to Know

Module 1

1. The distinction between faith and reason
2. The meaning of spirituality from a biblical perspective
3. How spirituality is measured
4. The relationship between physical and spiritual realms
5. The relationship between secular and sacred
6. The meaning of the idea of the sacred and holy
7. What makes holiness desirable?
8. The nature of spirituality

Module 2

1. What is meant by a "sense" of the sacred?
2. What is meant by a sense of mystery?

Module 3

1. The meaning of alienation and spiritual need
2. The meaning of the concept of sin
3. The concept of redemption
4. Law vs. grace within a biblical context

Module 4

1. The concept of spiritual community
2. The meaning of a believing community
3. The meaning of a proclaiming community
4. The meaning of a worshiping community
5. The meaning of a community of compassion
6. The meaning of an encouraging community
7. Be able to describe the church as it appeared in the New Testament

Module 5

1. The relation between ethics and spirituality
2. How spirituality is reflected in personal life, social circles, and family settings
3. Illustrate spiritual action in terms of service

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A Search for Spirituality

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to embark on a measured quest for spirituality? Are you among those who find the prospect inviting? Or, do you fear that rationality may be sacrificed? We should like to think that this course will be a true pursuit for authentic spirituality without the sacrifice of our human endowments. At least, that is the intent.

Our vision is that of a “whole” life. We make no pretense and offer no apology for this vision. We appeal to the inquisitive spirit that lies within each of us to claim the blessing of authentic spirituality. The quest will not be easy, because the subject is larger than human capacity. It will not be without tension, for there is plenty room for argument. It will not be without hesitation, as our humanity pulls us in another direction.

We promise to deal with vexing questions pertaining to what we call reality, but not necessarily solve them to the full satisfaction of human curiosity. We will look beyond the emotions that are common to the human experience and ask, Is there anything else? If so, how should I understand and embrace this “spiritual” or “other world” reality?

Clarifying the pursuit. We shall be concerned with matters that belong to the sphere of the invisible but that have application within the visible realm. However, establishing a dichotomy between “visible” and “invisible” is inadequate terminology for the distinction we shall be describing. It is not that the unseen is unfamiliar to us, for it is all around us. It belongs to the “seen” world, that is to the world that humans can sense. As you look across a beautifully landscaped park, you see flowers, birds, and trees. What you do not see is the wind, the oxygen you breathe, or the carbon dioxide taken in by plant life. You may see the effects of a draught or old age, but you are blind to forces that cause death to plants, that allows the

human heart to beat, or that enables the brain to function. What you observe through your senses does not distinguish between spiritual and unspiritual, even though you may be inspired by what you see. The “spiritual” component is more closely connected with the questions of Why? and How? than with the What?

Frankly, we cannot find terms that adequately describe the essential differentiation between the two interlocking “realities” with which this course deals. We can only point to common terms that in some way attempt to reference the spiritual dimension within the context of an integrated cosmic system. Perhaps as a working distinction, we may use the rather common terms “physical” and “metaphysical.” Yet, even here the terms do not capture the distinctions. Humans employ the term “metaphysical” to describe abstract thought, causality, and being. But the term stops short of housing the concept of spirituality.

Another popular term is “ethereal.” In its usual employment, it points to an immaterial realm, to something that is not real as perceived by human experience. It may be described as celestial, heavenly, or spiritual. In the latter instance, it suggests something that is holy, godly, or sacred. Although common usage may not intend to convey a sacred context for the ethereal, the idea of a “celestial” realm points to an otherworld reality.

In some sense, the distinction being made in this course is between “cause” and “effect.” God spoke and the world came into existence. But even these terms are inadequate, because they suggest determinism. Human freedom and accountability cannot be removed from the equation.

The unseen in both its cause and effect is evident in the stimulation of emotions, dispositions, motivations, moods, love, grief, and anger. These entities are real and arise from the human soul, which no one has ever seen. Ironically, these sensations can be judged as “spiritual” and “unspiritual” but the standard derives from the Creator, not the created. The fact that the same activity can be classified by the motives held by those who undertake them points to still another dimension of the unseen realm—the presence of good and evil. One may perform out of love and another out of hate. It is this spirit within that blesses or curses the actor. In the long run, it is not simply emotions, feelings, motives, or other “unseen” elements within the physical universe that account for spirituality. For that, we must look beyond a mechanical universe.

If one admits that a “spiritual” world exists, one should expect overlap. The two are interlaced. The “cause” (God) and the “effect” (a physical universe) show overlap in the sense that God’s glory is displayed through the marvelous cosmos. This course goes even one step beyond the phenomenon of creation. It adds the relationship between the Creator and his human creature. Herein lies the essence of human spirituality.

More specifically, our venture shall examine that particular aspect of the non-material universe we call the “sacred.” The sacred is set apart from the profane, not because of some intrinsic quality, but because of its direct association with the Creator of the cosmos. Consequently, we shall deal with spirituality through reasoned processes, but we shall not confine spiritual reality to natural science or human feeling.

Before we begin, we should make another distinction. We should distinguish between “spiritual realm” and “spirituality.” Generically, the term “spiritual realm” is employed to denote a domain invisible to the human eye—a domain that hosts entities capable to entering the physical cosmos for both good and evil. That domain is not subject to the scientific method that relies on the five human senses. To some extent, that domain may be conceived by the human mind, but the human mind cannot comprehend it. It both preceded human intelligence and continues after human death.

When we speak of “spirituality,” we intend to convey the idea that spirituality is a good condition that is defined by the nature of God, the sovereign source of all being who cannot be confined to the physical cosmos. By this definition, spirituality is not rightly defined as some condition a person wishes it to be. It is really not something one grows into. Only God can define it, determine it, and make it possible.

In our pursuit, we should ask, How could one who has no control over his/her sex, parents, place of birth, IQ, or ethnicity hope to define good and evil? How could one who did not exist yesterday and will be gone tomorrow conceivably pronounce judgment on God? What authority is the Russian cosmonaut who circled the earth and then boldly declared there was no God because he did not see him in space? Man does not need to prove the existence of God, nor see him. He only needs to recognize his Creator in whose image he has been made and respond to him in the manner in which the Creator has specified.

Why begin with “spirituality”? Are you wondering why a program in biblical or religious studies begins with spirituality? The answer is inherent to the pursuit itself, for biblical and religious studies should be more than an academic exercise. Rightly conceived, biblical/religious studies have spirituality as the goal. This course functions as an introduction to the Certificate in Biblical Studies and the Bachelor of Religious Studies, both of which follow interdependent tracks—one spiritual and the other academic. Since the academic track concentrates on religious texts that bear witness to the spiritual, it seems appropriate to set the stage for textual study by clarifying the reason why textual study should be undertaken.

Religious texts do not establish the existence of a metaphysical realm; they merely witness to its nature. Consequently, when one reads, “In the beginning God . . .” (Genesis 1:1), the biblical statement neither argues for, nor proves, God’s existence. It testifies to his existence and his actions. The statement itself no more “establishes” the existence of God than a declaration of his absence destroys him. We look elsewhere for “evidence.” It is a fair question to ask, In what direction does the evidence point? But then, this is not a course in apologetics. For this course, the biblical witness is taken at face value.

The present study interprets the evidence as pointing toward God’s existence. On that basis, we assume that spirituality derives its meaning from a proper understanding of God’s nature and activity. The study, therefore, rests with a worldview that allows for an open system of reality. In other words, neither the spiritual realm nor spirituality can be explained through human reason and emotions. Furthermore, neither is discernable through the scientific method. By taking an open system approach, one is able to allow unseen forces to penetrate the physical cosmos. A closed system sees mankind as nothing more than the accumulation of atoms accidentally bumping into one another without mind or design. The closed system attributes to the human mind features that rightly originate in the ethereal realm. It is here that we begin to distinguish between the “unseen” elements of our physical world (wind, brain functions, and life itself) and the metaphysical world (sources and entities that lie behind and are responsible for the functions of a live universe).

A journey. The course is laid out as a journey. There are five stages to the journey (marked as Modules 1-5), each of which calls for a decision. In fact, the course is built as a decision tree, where each stage demands a resolution on your part about whether you wish to persist. To continue the journey from one stage to the next, you must proceed along the line of the proposition, though, of course, you are not required to accept it in your own conscience to continue the course.

The journey begins with YOU, the student. Regardless of your personal convictions, you are the honored traveler. Like anyone who embarks on a long journey, you are as prepared as you need to be at the initial stage of this expedition. You can turn back at any time. You decide at each stop if you want to continue.

As the journey proceeds, you will see how spirituality is defined from a biblical perspective. You will see it unfold into an idealized form, not necessarily as the majority of Christians practice it. After all, it is the ideal to which we aspire, not the corrupted form.

MODULE 1 THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY

Life, as we know it in the flesh, is cast in a physical environment. We experience it through touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. Touch enables us to enjoy the finer textures of cloth and avoid encroaching on the thorn bush. Taste brings physical pleasure to the palate and warns us of spoiled food. Sight invigorates the sense of beauty and spotlights obstacles in our path. Sound surrounds us with uplifting music and warns of impending danger. Smell draws us to the fragrance of the rose and makes the stench of the skunk repulsive.

As human beings, we are well equipped to survive in our material world. The human frame is a remarkable one, containing all the systems necessary for fueling and maintaining fleshly life. It has an amazing ability to adapt to changing climates, diets, and circumstances. The human body is nothing short of spectacular amazement! This is especially surprising in view of the simple elements that comprise it.

Although man appears as a physical being, he is neither a mechanical robot nor a frame comprised merely of dirt and water. Man experiences both pleasure and pain; he is capable of love and hate; he is tempted by a variety of enticements that may control both body and mind. None of these elements fall into the classic definition of rationality. But they do testify that man is a complex being, consisting of both mind and sensation.

Sensations, their causes, and their sources lie beyond human comprehension. One's emotions and other unseen aspects of being bear witness to the presence of something that cannot be explained in physical terms. When one loves, one experiences non-material emotion. Depression may be caused by a chemical imbalance within the physical body, but despondency cannot be seen in a microscope. When one experiences the death of a loved one, one understands the difference between a dead physical body and a live person. But no one can explain it.

Within each human being is also found a hint of the "spiritual." In facing death, the possibility of a spiritual realm is conjectured. In the depth of despair, one may be overcome with a sense of burden because of a sinful act. Under the umbrella of the stars, one asks, Who made these?

How can one explain the difference between flesh and spirit? We are dealing with matters that no human words can elucidate, for no human comprehends the full measure of the phenomenon. We simply know we live in a world where matter and spirit, the visible and invisible, the real and the imagined intersect.

The first stage of the journey (Module 1) moves along the path that affirms it is reasonable to believe in the spirit world, which includes God and Satan; it is reasonable to believe that God has revealed himself to man through the Bible; and it is reasonable to believe that encounter with the sacred is necessary for spirituality to occur. Are you ready for the journey to begin?

Unit 1. Reason and Faith

Now that you have decided to begin the journey, you have agreed at this point only to explore the question of the reasonableness of faith.

The journey begins with the "rational" side of man, because the human brain is the organ within our person that enlightens us regarding the experiences of our world. The brain processes information fed to it by the five senses. It controls motor skills and emotions. It enables learning, assessment, and judgment. It is capable of creative and visionary plans. It enables one to retain and refine life skills. It houses a conscience, and it opens a window to the unseen world. Man's marvelous mind gives him the

capability of perceiving the world that surrounds his physical frame. To be sure, much about the universe remains to be learned or is simply not knowable. But the fact that the human mind is capable of entertaining thoughts about the physical, emotional, and spirit realm demonstrates that man's thoughts about these things are "rational."

We must admit here that we as humans differentiate between the mind of a child and that of an adult, between that of a healthy mind and a sick mind, and between normal and abnormal behavior. The aberrations we know quite well—the mind of a perpetual criminal, the demented old person, and the mentally unstable. For our purposes, let us assume that when we talk of reason and faith, we are concerned with the healthy mind. The study rests on the idea that a legitimate pursuit of spirituality can be undertaken only by a fully rational human mind. One determines within one's own consciousness if the quest of the spiritual has personal merit. Of course, that decision does not determine the true value of the spiritual—just whether one chooses to pursue it.

Since we know that the healthy mind is capable of conceiving of, and reacting to, the spirit realm as easily as it is to sensory perception, then the idea of "faith" in the unseen is not unreasonable. Faith indeed depends on a rational process, though it cannot be defined as a creation of human rational thinking.

As you stand on the threshold of your venture, you face a decision. You must decide if you are ready to pursue the concept of a spirit world, a world of the unseen. If you do not wish to entertain the idea at all, the journey is over before it begins. You will be the loser, for you will never know what you missed. If you do decide to pursue the topic, then read on.

a. Human rationality. "Rational" suggests the use of reason as a function. The primary core of the term refers to what can be gathered from the human mind. By default, the definition of rationality depends on circular reasoning, human judgment, and a closed system. As for circular reasoning, rationalism assumes there are limits of information that the brain can generate. Thus, rationality is often defined with these self-imposed limitations in mind. Rationality calls for human judgment as to what is "reasonable." Human judgment decides what state of mind determines sanity, sensibility, coherency, and normalcy. Rationalism operates as a closed system when it admits only self-imposed categories of reality. Questions to keep in mind when applying rationalistic thinking are these: Is the totality of reality limited to the brain? Or, is there another realm beyond its environment that exists apart from the brain and about which it can only imagine—or imagine at all?

The human brain. The brain is the only organ within our being that enables us to perceive physical and metaphysical reality. It is the means by which one assimilates the spiritual. The physical and metaphysical do not exist because they are conceived by the human mind. They exist prior to human birth and apart from human imagination. The brain merely enables one to perceive reality.

To the eye, the human brain has a similar appearance to other organs—the heart, lung, or kidney. From physical sight, there appears to be nothing special about it. It can be described, and theories can be devised about how it works. Yet, the brain itself remains a mystery. As long as the human body is sufficiently healthy, it functions. But when the body dies, the brain dies. Whether we understand it or not, the fact remains: man is a rational being. And that rational being has limitations of time, space, and capacity.

Limits to rationalization. Rationalization is often touted as an opposite of spiritual phenomenon, as though knowledge or awareness does not exist apart from the five senses. "Rationalistic" so defined can be found in many disciplines, including science, anthropology, and comparative religions. Scholars who apply evolutionary theory to their disciplines tend to eliminate the role of God and explain life in wholly physical terms. An evolutionary view of the world's existence rules out God from the creative act and from involvement in human affairs. An evolutionary view of the development of human civilization tends to treat values and morals as purely human inventions brought about by the need of survival. In a similar way, a rationalistic approach to religion tends to treat circumstances as the result of human efforts to cope with a physical world. In so doing, this type of rationalistic thinking makes the spiritual captive to its own preconceived categories. Hence, the intellect attempts to control the spiritual. In the end, man becomes

“god.” He sets the standards, controls his own destiny (or so he thinks), and judges between good and evil.

One challenge to a purely rationalistic (human mind) approach may be cast in question form. How did man get here? How did he gain the right to set the standard for himself and all others when he has no control over matters of life and death? He neither creates life, nor has he the capacity to become immortal. He too succumbs to the elements that encapsulate him. The real question about human rationality is this: Is the human mind the final authority as to what is authentic reality?

To this point, we have only established that man is a rational being. As such, he is capable of having feeling and emotion and he is capable of conceiving a realm of intelligent unseen forces. He is thus able to deal with the unseen world, with emotions, with basic spiritual needs, with alienation, and with eternity. The inner thoughts of man challenge the idea that “what you see is all there is!” Even the physical universe remains a puzzle and points to some outside influence or intervention.

Here, you have a decision to make. To continue, either (1) you accept the proposition that it is reasonable to believe in the spirit world or (2) you are willing to entertain the idea of a spirit world.

b. The concept of God. Assuming that it is reasonable to believe in God, we proceed with the idea that God is sovereign, absolute, a spirit being. Otherwise, he is not God at all, but a limited force whose influence is determined by factors outside himself. If the latter is the case, the concept of God becomes subject to human conjecture.

Man perceives God with his mind. We shall assume that the only way one can conceive of God is with one's mind and through one's own person. Otherwise, man has no capacity to conceive of God in any form. Yet, we shall not reduce God to human rationality, as he exists apart from a man's mind. Having said that, we must allow that the concept of God is compatible with life as we know and experience it. Many of the attributes used to describe God are but extensions of those common to human life. Within ourselves, however, we acknowledge our limitation when it comes to conceiving or describing the infinite. Those characteristics we attribute to God are similar to our own, and they are conceptualized by the human mind. Even divine revelation embodied in the Bible makes use of concepts that can be grasped by human intellect. Hence, the concept of God is rational.

While the conceptualization of deity is intellectual, deity itself cannot be reduced to the human intellect. Rationalization is merely the location for our own conception of God, for this is how we are constituted. We may be physical beings, clothed with flesh and enlivened with blood, but the mind enables the body to function and provides our internal window to the world of reality—both the seen and the unseen.

To acknowledge with the mind the possibility of God and the presence of God does not mean God can be reduced to a figment of human imagination. Neither does it imply that human rationality has no capacity for accepting the miraculous or spiritual reality. Likewise, theology acknowledges the place of the human intellect in spiritual matters. In other words, rationalism is no more unconcerned with spiritual realities than theology is unconcerned with rational thinking. They are mutually dependent. It is only when one attempts to deny the other that an indefensible situation arises. The rationalist cannot legitimately deny the reality of spiritual attributes and the believer in God cannot ignore rational processes. The purely secularist position is doomed to failure, because it does not take into account the possibility of anything that cannot be demonstrated by the scientific method. A purely intuitive position regarding the unseen world fails to take into account the relationship of faith to a defined body of knowledge. Furthermore, the religious practitioner is obliged to affirm a balanced relationship between divine involvement in the physical realm and the spiritual battles that the human eye cannot see.

God is perceived through human qualities. When God is reduced to the form of man, beast, or the elements, God is remade into something humans feel they can control or, at least, manipulate. The foolishness of such action is well described by the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. He paints the picture of a craftsman who cuts a tree and begins to chisel it into a desired form. The craftsman adorns it with silver and gold and dresses it in fine clothing. He fastens it to the floor so it will not topple. The idol

can neither walk nor talk. It has no thoughts. It is nothing more than a decorated piece of wood. And yet, its admirers fall down before it and worship it ([Jeremiah 10](#)). If someone were to say, “Oh, but the idol is not the God. The idol only represents God,” then the idol is a poor representative of God! One should get rid of the idol and see God for who he really is—the creator and sustainer of life.

When God is conceived as a rock, a tree, or a star, he is no more than an inanimate object that has none of the qualities we associate with life. If one conceives of God as a cow, the emperor, or an ancestor, then God may be an animate object that is mortal, a cow that is sub-human, an emperor who clings to power by brute force, or an ancestor who controls through superstition. None of these options fit the concept of “God” as one who is worthy of divine honor, fellowship, and petition. When we conceive of God as a “spiritual” being as opposed to one who is bound by time and space, we recognize him as One who possesses an infinite mind, who has the ability to will and to purpose, who wields unlimited power, unity, and One who possesses moral goodness, emotion, love, and personhood. As expressed in Psalm 50:9-12, God does not need man’s sacrifices, for he knows every bird and owns every creature.

Exercise. The exercise expands on the preceding discussion concerning the concept of God and consists of a single paragraph essay that focuses on Acts 17:15-34. It will test your ability to analyze a biblical text and capture its meaning in your own words. Write out a topic sentence, three to five sentences that provide specific details, elaboration, examples, or descriptions to support the topic, and a closing sentence to summarize the whole paragraph.

Background. Is it possible that God has put the sense of eternity in us? Anthropologists tend to confirm the point through their discovery that the presence of religious activity has been found among all civilizations—ancient and modern. Read the biblical account of the apostle Paul’s speech—Acts 17:15-34. Examine the text carefully and look for both his *logic* and the *responses* of his listeners. Identify the speaker, the audience, his words, and the context.

Exercise example: a paragraph considering the existence of an evil one in view of the sovereignty of God (Job 1:1-2:8). The opening sentence is the topic sentence. Sentences two through four elaborate on the topic sentence. The last two sentences summarize the paragraph.

The test of a righteous man brought unexpected results. Satan, who is portrayed as an antagonist to God and man, wanted to demonstrate that Job’s loyalty was tied directly to divine blessing. Satan aimed to destroy Job’s faith. While God allowed Satan to oppress Job, God knew Job’s loyalty to be unshakeable. The conversation between Satan and God makes it clear that God allowed Satan to create situations that devastated Job but only to the point that God allowed. He was permitted to afflict Job but not to take his life. Toward the end of the book, the primary purpose of the composition is revealed. Through the test, God taught Job that his actions are not fully comprehensible to man. Man’s duty is to trust the Faithful One.

You have now reached the point at which you must make another decision. Your decision is not based on whether you actually believe in God, but to continue, you must at least assume his existence and entertain the thought that God has revealed himself in the Bible.

c. Religion: revelation, miracles, and demons. Religion, which embraces the spiritual quest, may depend on rational processes in the course of conceptualization, action, and behavior, but it does more. “Religion” becomes the vehicle for the human being to understand the spiritual world, to comprehend the rationale for ethics, to appreciate the concept of covenant relationship with God, and to approach eternity.

“Religion” is associated with faith, ritual, and behavior. It admits to the idea that powers exist in the spirit world that should be either appeased or honored. From a pagan perspective, the powers need to be placated and controlled so they will act for man’s benefit and not for his harm. From a Christian perspective, God is honored for who he is and what he has done. If religion is defined as the human reaching for God, then Christianity is not a religion. In Christianity God reaches down to humankind and

initiates the relationship. To this, “revelation” recorded in biblical scripture testifies.

Revelation. Not all religions have written scriptures. Not all claim that God has spoken through words to his creation. From the Christian perspective, God has revealed himself through both the natural order and orally through select humans. The latter is called “divine revelation.” If faith is a rational process, then we should be able to deduce its legitimacy from reading the scriptures that claim to be revelation. These scriptures must be reasonable.

With the risk of allowing the human mind to be the judge of the validity of all claims to revelation, we would venture that the claims to revelation must not be self-contradictory or contradictory to the natural order. Common tests may include the following. If the revelation contains prophecy, has the prophecy been fulfilled? Are the ideas contained within the revelation coherent? Does the revelation make untenable demands? Are historical references consistent with known facts of history? Is the revelation valuable?

Miracles. The Old Testament contains numerous occasions when the supernatural broke into the natural. As circumstances differed, so did the event. Some of these miracles were the flood of Noah’s day (Genesis 6-8), the plagues upon Egypt and the Exodus of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 7-14), the feeding of Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 11), the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6), Elisha’s floating axe (2 Kings 6:1-6), and the sun dial’s retreat (Isaiah 38:1-8).

Miracles were a distinguishing feature of Jesus’ ministry. The straightforward accounts of the Gospels and the witness of history make these accounts credible. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, turned water into wine, multiplied a small amount of food into enough to feed a multitude, walked on water, and rebuked the storm.

The New Testament also confirms that the apostles were endowed with the power to perform miracles as well. On occasion, gifts could be passed to a second generation of believers. The use of spiritual gifts seems to have been widespread, although more is said about circumstances in Corinth than anywhere else, where an extensive list of miraculous acts is recorded ([1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#)). The apostle Paul made it clear that boasting that a perceived superior gift gave one a greater degree of spirituality was, in fact, unspiritual. He advocated the exercise of love, which offers evidence of the Spirit at work in the life of a believer ([1 Corinthians 13](#); [Galatians 5:22](#)).

Jesus possessed miraculous powers beyond that of others. One may reason that the powers grew out of a consciousness of his mission, but in the ultimate sense, these powers offered evidence of his association with God. To whatever extent the apostles and early believers were endowed with the ability to perform miracles must have been connected with extending Jesus’ mission.

The miracles performed by Jesus and his apostles arose out of the circumstances of their ministries. Many of these miracles benefited people by bringing healing, yet they were performed very selectively. As noble as the idea may be, making every sick person well was not the primary object of the miracles. The miracles of Jesus and his apostles were special and relevant to their ministries. They cannot be appreciated without understanding the contexts in which they were performed. They are called miracles because they were selective and out of the ordinary—out of the norm. Although not identical in scope and purpose, the presence of God into the lives of his people today is essential to the idea of spirituality. God is at work in his world—even in special ways the world does not comprehend. But this does not mean that miracles are a routine occurrence.

God is not limited, and he is able to perform miracles. And we often speak as though we have seen some performed. Part of the question about the miraculous comes down to semantics. What is a miracle? Is the answer to a prayer for the sick a “miracle”? Or is it simply “providence”? Does one contribute the saving of a person from the Tsunami a miracle? What was the Tsunami itself? The questions are many. The categories are confused. Admittedly, the answers are evasive. Yet, affirming that God has interjected himself into the physical realm is part of the spiritual experience.

The demonic world. The ability of Jesus to cast out demons demonstrated Jesus' power over the demonic world. When his opponents charged him with casting out demons by the authority of Satan, he quipped, "If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself." Then, he added, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" ([Matthew 12:22-28](#)).

Demons were commonly known in the ancient world. Christ dealt with them and exercised control over them ([Colossians 2:15](#)). Only through Christ, can demons be overcome. The Christian "struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the supernatural forces of evil in the heavenly realms." So, the spiritual man does not deny the demonic world; he braces against it by putting on "the full armor of God" ([Ephesians 6:12-13](#)).

Reflection. The reflection exercises below call upon you to ponder the questions raised. Whether you resolve them is not important. Your contemplation is important. Use the questions or statements as prompts. You need not answer every question, but you should discuss the question in bold. The benefit in reflections comes when you look back at your thinking after time passes or you complete the course.

Compose your reflections in a Word document. Number them as they are numbered in the syllabus. Submit all reflections in a single document at the end of the course. See the Course Menu, under Module 5 for upload instructions.

Reflection 1-1. What is the possibility that God has communicated with man? If we look at nature, we may say he is communicating something of his being—his power, his sense of beauty, and even his wrath. But what about sources that make a claim to divine authority? By what criteria can such claims be evaluated? What problems do these sources address which lie outside human reason? Is there anything Buddhism has missed through its internal meditations? With strong emphasis on human endeavor, is there more to know than can be known through the human mind? Is there more to know than can be known by observing nature? What is unique about divine revelation? Does it contradict knowledge attained by human reason? What are the controls for divine revelation? Are all messages that carry the claim of divine inspiration really from a divine source or are some fraudulent?

The above questions need to be addressed in a rational manner. There should be no conflict between the rational and the non-material. Conflict comes when one seeks to overrule the other—when either the mind discounts the spiritual altogether or when one's affirmation of the spiritual realm disengages one from normal human life. Note here, we are defining rational as having to do with reason without making the human mind the ultimate judge as to the validity of what is reasoned. And we are defining spiritual insight as that which comes from comprehensible revelation.

Reflection 1-2. The major question here is, Have miracles ever occurred? Is it rational to believe that God has intervened into human affairs with an act that momentarily allows the natural course to be superseded? In response, we should admit that it is just as reasonable to think that God has intervened, as to deny it. If one attributes creation to God, one can hardly deny the miraculous. What then excludes the possibility that God has on occasion touched his creation to bring about the unusual? Why limit God's ability to come to earth? Why limit God's ability to love humankind? Why limit God's ability to have a Son? Why could his Son not walk on water, heal the sick, and raise the dead? Why be so quick to limit the powers of God when one so readily relies on human science to do similar feats?

The possibility of miracles does not imply indiscriminate acceptance of miraculous claims. Not every person who claims the power to heal is able to do so. Not every place designated by a church as a place of healing is indeed one. When rational thinking is used to test the claimants, certain questions should be asked. How did you receive authority to perform miracles? Can the claims to miracles be substantiated? How consistent is the performance of the supposed miracles with Scripture? The preceding questions show how the rational process should be used to balance the claims of spiritual insight.

Reflection 1-3. What are your thoughts about the existence of an evil one in view of the sovereignty of God? Read the prologue to the Old Testament book of Job—[Job 1:1-2:8](#). From the

prologue, you will get a sense of the reality of Satan and his evil intentions. The purpose here is not to pursue the literary nature of the book or even to deal with the problem of suffering.

You have arrived at a new juncture in your journey. To this point, you have granted the reasonableness of God and his engagement with humanity. The next phase deals with the concept of the sacred or the holy and its connection with spirituality. Are you prepared to continue your journey?

Unit 2. The Sacred and the Holy

In common usage, “spirituality” describes a wide variety of feelings and ideas. One may be heard to say, “That is so spiritual!” and mean nothing more than, “That gives me a sense of identity!” One might hear a person say, “That gives me a spiritual high!” and intend to convey no more than, “That makes me feel great!” This may be quasi-spirituality; it is not true spirituality. In the context of this course, spirituality has a more definitive meaning.

Spirituality involves the human mind, but its primary concern lies with its connection with the non-material or spirit world. Even here, not all engagements with the spirit world fall within the boundaries of spirituality, for the spirit world contains both good and evil elements. Specifically, spirituality implies connection with the “good” in the non-material world. This “good” can be understood only in relation to the “sacred” or the “holy.”

The sacred or the holy is the opposite of profane, secular, or mundane. For argument’s sake, we will define it as something other than the innate qualities of good found in humankind. In some ways, the classification of all things into secular and sacred is a convenient way to distinguish between two seemingly independent entities. Then, on the other hand, it creates a dichotomy, which brings unnecessary rivalry between the two spheres. As the human mind has the capacity to produce thoughts about mechanical matters and at the same time express compassion for the people who work with the machinery, so the “secular” and the “spiritual” may be said to coexist.

We may express it thusly: Spirituality pertains to the sacred or the holy. What is sacred and holy is at once distinct from mundane, secular, profane interests of the physical world. It is the counterpart of evil in the spirit world. It is not to be confused with the innate conscience of man. Spirituality is a “state” or a “process” of engagement that brings one into contact with that which has been consecrated or separated from the secular as well as from evil. The spiritual person lives in a secular world, but spirituality conditions that person to behave in this secular world in a more responsible fashion.

Unit 2 begins the second portion of the first stage of the journey. You have gotten to this point by assuming it is reasonable to believe in the spirit world, which includes God and Satan. You are now set to explore the sacred and the holy. The leading assumption is, The sacred or the holy is an external reality.

a. Defining the sacred and the holy. To proceed, you will need to assume that the arena of the sacred and the holy are connected with God, who is the standard by which holiness is defined and measured. The concept of holiness implies that some things may be hallowed, while other things are ordinary. Furthermore, the idea of holiness has no meaning apart from God. The natural man operates on standards of right and wrong. Democracies pass laws that define what is legal and what is illegal. Personal and legal standards may reflect the virtuous because man has been innately imbibed with a sense of decency and order. In a secular, rationalistic sense, these human virtues may be derived from God and, therefore, be “sacred.” However, in the context of spirituality that is consciously and deliberately connected with the sacred, there is both a qualitative and a quantitative difference. There is a dimension to spirituality that can be understood only apart from the natural order.

Terms. Synonyms generally used for sacred are holy, blessed, consecrated, hallowed, revered, sanctified, and sacrosanct. When the idea of the sacred is introduced, it immediately becomes classified as a “religious” topic. In much of today’s world, “religion” is a matter of personal conviction, which should

be kept out of the work place and out of politics. While history has taught us the value of “keeping religion out of politics,” what kind of political state would we have if all “spiritual” values were relegated to the trash pile? It is impossible to know to what extent the human being is “religious” when he insists on honesty, integrity, and compassion. These traits cannot be analyzed in a chemical test tube, but they are vital to a sane and safe society. If they are admitted on the basis of being “rational,” then ethical qualities are not all “sacred.” Furthermore, one of the synonyms—holiness—has been associated with morality and ethics. The concept of holiness, with all its attendant themes, belongs to the sphere of the spiritual rather than to that of innate human rationality. This does not mean that holiness is irrational. It means that there is a dimension here that is not necessarily inherent to the rational process.

The common use of the terms “holy” and “sacred” is not necessarily the same as when they were originally introduced in history. And, the terms may not be conveyed fully when translated from ancient languages into modern ones. We should be concerned with definitions from the past as well as in the present, if we are to gain a proper understanding of those terms. For example, in today’s world, holiness evokes the idea of something that is perfectly good in a moral sense. From the Old Testament perspective, holiness follows covenant relationship with God, who is “holy” (see [Leviticus 10:3](#); [11:44](#)). Thus, in an ancient setting, holiness is more than a good law, a good thing, or a religious thing. Holiness is a quality that is associated with God. It sets apart and elevates those who love him.

Defining factors. The word “holy” cannot be strictly defined, because it represents unique values and state of mind. Hence, when we deal with a spiritual element, we must also recognize the individual conscious and the operation of the spiritual within.

If humans are left to determine good and evil, it is done so in combination of three foundation stones: (1) intuition, (2) social consensus and legislation, and (3) individual, personal assessment. When dealing with the absolute, which includes the person of God, the rationale for the truly sacred is God’s person. In sacred matters, God becomes the guarantor of his promises, because he is always true to himself. This not only establishes absolutes in the rational world; it gives credibility to God’s love as well as to his wrath.

Briefly put, we are dealing with subjects that lie beyond our ability to comprehend. The sacred and the secular are not necessarily mutually exclusive. If the holy is antagonistic to the material world, then God can have nothing to do with the world he created. Gnosticism dealt with this by attributing the creation of the universe to a lesser god. This lesser god had enough power to create, but there had to be great distance between lesser and higher gods. If the lesser god was a god at all, he still could not become associated with matter, which was considered to be evil. These ideas are untenable.

On the other hand, if the holy (in this case God) is equated with the universe, the result is Pantheism. The holy is not equivalent to the secular, but at face value neither are the two antagonistic. In contrast to the god of stone or wood, “the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him” (Habakkuk 2:20).

The secular is not by nature “unholy.” To designate a place as “unholy” or “holy” has nothing to do with the facility itself. In other words, the toilet is not more unholy than one’s office. A bedroom may become an “unholy” place if a man has sexual relations with a woman not his wife, but the room itself is neither holy nor unholy. A building dedicated to Christian worship may be called a “sanctuary,” but in and of itself, it is no more holy than a grocery store. A sense of holiness is attributed to the facility when it is dedicated to worship and so commands reverence and respect, as does a cemetery. Bricks and mortar remain bricks and mortar. Our designation of something as a “holy” facility is a matter of contrivance. A tabernacle was built by Israel in the wilderness at Yahweh’s instruction. It contains a “holy place” and a “most holy place.” These were so, not because the physical materials were holy, but because the tent had been set apart for special purposes that pertained to God’s presence with Israel. And so was the case with the temple constructed by Solomon.

Man and the sacred. The physical and spirit worlds exist without the presence of man. Hence, they are *a priori* elements of the universe. From a truly rationalistic perspective, religion may be a creation of the

human mind to deal with perceived realities. From a larger perspective, religion is man's response to ultimate realities.

When one hears the gospel (that is, the Good News that God loves us and has made a plan for us to be free from sin), one is inclined to use familiar categories and worldviews to screen and interpret what one hears. This is especially true when what one hears goes against what one has been conditioned to believe. When one modifies the teachings of the gospel to conform to established beliefs, attitudes, and habits, the result is syncretism. Finding a way to accept one's preferences and rejecting what one finds objectionable produces a personal worldview. But this process cannot lead to a spiritual faith, for the content of faith is not a matter of accommodation.

Humans can never attain to absolute love or good in the physical realm. But they must not conclude that they have the liberty of picking and choosing from a spiritual basket those items that are appealing and rejecting those that do not fit one's lifestyle. This is not to contend that salvation (that is, restoration to fellowship with God) is based on human perfection. It is to state that when man pursues spirituality, God, not man, establishes the definitions of spirituality. The irony is this: man can only imagine the absoluteness of things associated with God; he cannot attain it in and of himself. Only through God's redeeming act in Jesus Christ is one made holy. From a biblical perspective, Christ Jesus has become "our righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

If you reach the point where you are willing to consider that God is the standard by which holiness is defined and measured, then you are ready to proceed to the next stop, which considers whether holiness is desirable.

b. What makes holiness desirable? We must proceed with the assumption that holiness has inherent value because of its connection with God.

God and man. The concept of God as a transcendent being brings mixed impressions. If that transcendence is associated with a characterization of God as a powerful overlord who is waiting for his creatures to go astray so he can crush them, then the concept is wrong. God may be transcendent in the sense that he is "other" and unbound by physical limitations, but not in the sense of character. A better word is "eminent." God possesses objective value as one who is worthy of praise. God comes near to man over and over again and repeatedly steps into human history to bring about his purposes.

In view of the august character of God, man's waywardness becomes pronounced. When one becomes conscious of this dichotomy, one is brought to one's knees and senses not only the distance between self and God, but also senses the loftiness of the One before whom he cannot hide, as Adam and Eve found in the Garden ([Genesis 3:10](#)).

Encounter with the sacred, *i.e.*, with God, makes this apparent due to the ineptness of man to stand before God. When confronted directly, the Hebrew prophet Isaiah recognized himself to be a person of unclean lips. Isaiah's unsuitability stemmed not from a single transgression, but from a condition of being devoid of the purity that would enable him to stand before God. As a man consumed by the secular, Isaiah was no match for his creator. The answer to his problem was not his removal from the secular realm but cleansing, the removal of guilt, and the atoning for his sins ([Isaiah. 6:5-7](#)).

Whether one recognizes it or not, there is a great chasm between God and man. By violating the standard of holiness, which is defined by God himself, man becomes a sinner. The natural man blinds his own eyes to the reality of the sacred, believing he can successfully ignore it. Those who are spiritually inclined become open to the sacred and respond to it, not with the fear of terror, but with awe, praise, and worship. Nevertheless, the sense of awe is not a substitute for redemption. As Isaiah realized his undone circumstance, this condition required moral cleansing. So, today, redemption (God's remedy for sin) through Jesus Christ is God's answer to man's sinful condition. Through Christ, one may be cleansed. The awe, praise, and adoration that one in Christ raises to God become an expected consequence of encounter with the sacred.

When one may in time realize his unworthiness before God, one may realize that holiness, if attainable, can provide a sense of worth, value, and assurance. Becoming holy brings blessings unattainable, except through God's initiative. As the apostle Paul said, Christ Jesus "has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). The act, incidentally, eliminates the possibility of human boasting. Jesus took our sin to the cross and gave us his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

If holiness does have inherent value because of its connection with God, the concept must be supported by the biblical witness. Your decision now is whether to consider the biblical record as definitive in this regard.

The witness of scripture. By assuming the authenticity of the biblical record, you will be reading to discover precisely what the Bible has to say about the sacred and the holy.

From a biblical perspective, the unseen world is constituted by two entities—powers of good and powers of evil. The essence of the good is God. The head of the forces of evil is Satan. The Bible does not advocate dualism, where both powers are equal and the eventual outcome of the struggle is uncertain. The demonic realm operates by the permission of God. In time, when its purpose is completed, it shall be secluded.

The unseen world is different from what we experience through our five senses. And yet, the spirit world, especially the forces of evil, appeals to us through the senses. Satan's approach to Eve in the Garden was through the senses, as well as by appealing to an aspiration to be independent of God. The text reads, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it" (Genesis 3:6). Because God had forbidden her to eat this fruit, the decision to disobey God changed her relationship with God.

The unseen realm evokes a different set of emotions than what we know normally. The demonic, as well as the divine, can be terrifying. What is ordinarily distant and transcendent penetrates the natural world of humanity. By its very nature, the supernatural is above and distinct from the natural. It is timeless, unfettered by physical constraints.

The Old Testament acknowledges the presence of both good and evil in the world of the supernatural. God appears in Genesis as the creator; Satan appears as the tempter (Genesis 1-3). Yahweh (the word recognized in the Hebrew Bible as God's personal name) reveals himself as sovereign; Satan is represented as the challenger. Yahweh represents what is good; Satan represents what is evil. The Hebrew Scriptures impress us with the person and presence of God. At the same time, Satan's influence is strong (see Job 1:1-2:10). Such is the context in which spirituality is found in the Old Testament.

In several instances in the Hebrew Scriptures, Yahweh's person becomes manifest to the human. Yahweh revealed his glory to Moses (Exodus 33:12-23). The dramatic scene presented in Isaiah shows Yahweh as overwhelming, possessing a character with perfect attributes of power and holiness (Isaiah 6). The glory of God is symbolized in Ezekiel as something that may shine in the temple, but the conduct of a sinful people can lead Yahweh to remove his glory from that man-made structure (Ezekiel 10). The entire scene, in which the departing glory is depicted, is wrapped in mystery.

In a less dramatic presentation, Job is summoned by God (Job 38-41). Although Job had stood his ground before his accusers, he probed to understand why God had allowed bad things to happen to him. He contended that his suffering was not a punishment for some great sin. And in that he was justified. However, following his encounter with God, who asked Job about common occurrences in the universe, Job said to God, "I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). In one and the same experience, Job is vindicated and embraced by God. It was rather that the consciousness of Job was struck; God did not zap him; no crazed behavior occurred.

In the end, God did not answer Job's question, "Why do I suffer?" God surely knew. But God's response

to Job was to show him that he was no match for God. There are some questions that should be left unasked. The absoluteness of God does not admit mere mortals to penetrate his person. God says to Job, in substance, “Let me be God, and you be man.” There are certain things that belong to God; others lie in man’s domain. Just as when Moses failed to sanctify the name of Yahweh and struck the rock ([Numbers 20:6-12](#)), the human needs always to defer to God. God’s ways are higher than man’s ways ([Isaiah 55:8-9](#)).

God is alive, the source of life, and the guarantor of life. Unlike humans, he is not subject to physical death. He is not limited in reasoning to the confines of the human brain. He is not limited by the demands of a fleshly habitat. He is capable of much more.

God appears in the Old Testament as a jealous God who exercises his wrath against the rebellious and evil doers. God is “jealous” in the sense that he has no equals; no other manifestation is worthy of such honor. No one can stand before the holiness of God who holds both Israel and the nations responsible for their behavior. He upholds his righteousness.

That the early Christians were called saints, appropriates to them their “holy” nature in Christ. This holiness is directly related to their relationship with, and faith in, Jesus. The expression indicated they had been set apart for God, not that they had become perfect little gods. The term sets these disciples apart from the profane or secular. These saints are also known as priests, who appear before the high priest, Jesus. Their prayers are part of their living sacrifice, which they constantly offer to God through Christ.

Reflection. The reflection activities that follow aim at sensitizing you both to the implications of the sacred in terms of morality and to the positive response that the sacred evokes.

Reflection 1-4. How would you describe God's nature? The apostle Paul sheds light on the human dilemma. Because of his holiness, the “wrath of God” is turned toward all godlessness and wickedness. From the beginning of human existence, man has no excuse for not recognizing “God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature.” Read and contemplate [Romans 1:18-32](#). Respond to the scripture.

Reflection 1-5. What should be man's attitude in the presence of God? While the sensation of an encounter with the sacred produces a sense of unworthiness, it does not necessarily bring on a fear of terror. The holy produces an urge to confess, bow before, and adore the Sacred One. It brings on the recognition of the absoluteness of the one being honored. Worship is offered to the One who is worthy.

The God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures and the God found in the Greek Scriptures of the Christian Bible is one and the same. He is the same holy God who works in the interest of his creation. In the Hebrew Scriptures, he is working toward a supreme act that will bring holiness to his creation. Compare the wording in Isaiah 6 with Revelation 4. Read the passages closely and write a comparison. You may prefer to create a diagram to illustrate the comparison.

c. The Sacred and Jesus Christ. As in the Old Testament, God is presented in the New Testament as absolute holiness. He consummated the redemptive process anticipated from Adam, fulfilled the promises made to Abraham, and nailed the covenant made to Israel to the cross of Christ. In the process, he has demonstrated his holiness and invites all his human creatures to experience the majesty that surrounds him.

The witness of Jesus. The witness of Jesus as to the person of God comes from a more-than-human relationship with God. The Scriptures declare him to be the “Word” of God who stood with God in creating the world. He came to live in the flesh to demonstrate the Father’s love and intentions for humanity. Born of a virgin, Jesus is incarnated in the flesh. Through his teaching, miracles, and person, he bore witness to God. Rejected by those who should have received him as the promised Messiah, he was crucified. Because he was the Son of God, Jesus was resurrected from the dead and ascended to the Father in heaven, where he reigns at the right hand of God over his spiritual kingdom. Read John 1:1-18.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray to God, beginning with “Hallowed be your name” (Matthew 6:9). The address acknowledges the position of God and brings to those who express the words a sense of wonder and reserve as one realizes the gravity of the occasion. To be indifferent to God and his ways is to open oneself to the wrath of God. Jesus warned, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Or again, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31). While the above verse lies in the context of God’s judgment on his people, a preceding verse accents judgment on the slothful and unbeliever: “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The deity of Jesus. Perhaps the best place to see the intersecting of the physical self with the divine is in the Garden of Gethsemane. As a precursor, Jesus often retreated from the crowds to pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:28; 11:1). Jesus felt the need to depend upon God as he executed his mission. Facing arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus entered into a prolonged period of intercession with the Father on the Mount of Olives. The substance of that prayer is more fully revealed in the Gospel of John, where Jesus is conscious of the power of the evil one in the disciples’ lives. But as Luke states it, he prayed in great agony. As he prayed, “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44). The whole event points to a great drama. Jesus is from the Father and he has revealed the Father to his disciples. He knows that the same evil power at work in his own crucifixion will attack his disciples as well. Jesus knows the glory of God, for he says, “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (John 17:25-26).

Jesus’ experience on the cross further accents the sublimity of the occasion. Following intense suffering, Jesus quoted the leading line of a lament from Psalm 22. Beginning with the phrase, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” the apparent intent is to express total faith and submission to his Father. The reason for this conclusion is found in the psalm itself. By its nature, a lament usually begins with an address, followed by a complaint, a petition, an expression of confidence, and praise. In Gethsemane, Jesus had prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). On the cross, he addresses God. He feels overwhelmed. There are even similarities between his circumstance and that expressed by the psalmist: “all who see me mock me, they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” Surely, the conclusion to the expression on the cross is not the opposite of what was expressed by the psalm. The psalm ends with an affirmation of confidence in God and praise for him. Taken in its context, the words of Jesus on the cross become a declaration of commitment par excellence, not an utterance of despair at being actually forsaken by God. The battle was won on the cross. Jesus’ victory over the Evil One offers assurance of salvation to those who believe in him.

Reflection. *In this set of reflections, you will read the biblical witness with respect to the identity of Jesus and the connection with the sacred.*

Reflection 1-6. **What conclusion can be drawn about the identify and role of Jesus from John 1 and Hebrews 1:1-4?**

Reflection 1-7. As the Word of God, Jesus is worthy of praise for who he is. As the Lamb who has overcome the world, he is worthy to be praised for what he has done in the work of redemption. In Christ, man finds holiness and the right to enter into the presence of God. **What is the general idea behind Revelation 4 and Revelation 5?**

Unit 2 has concentrated on establishing the connection between the sacred and God. Assuming there is a connection, you are ready for the third phase of Stage 1 in the journey. To continue, you need to be open

to an exploration of the meaning of spirituality and how it is expressed.

Unit 3. The Nature of Spirituality

Now that we have set the parameters for spirituality, we shall look more specifically at its essence and how it is appropriated. We shall pursue spirituality as a state of being that is informed by the Bible. For our purposes, we will not admit other definitions. We delimit the topic for two reasons. First, to consider a wider arena would spread our study too thin. Second, if our assumption is correct and the Bible provides the essential information on spirituality, we need not go beyond its bounds.

We are not denying that other insights into spirituality can be derived from non-biblical sources. We are not saying that religions other than Christianity do not have some high views of what is spiritual and what is not. The essence here is that biblical scriptures are definitive.

The point to be developed in the course is not whether good and evil exist in the non-material realm. That conclusion is reached by means of understanding what has been revealed and is now recorded in the Bible. The focal question is, What should one's attitude and relationship be toward those realities that command our response—namely, to God as the embodiment of all that is good and to Satan as the embodiment of all that is evil?

As previously stated, spirituality refers to the realm of the "spirit." The "spiritual" aspect concerns or pertains to a non-material or unseen world. It is usually cast in the realm of the sacred or the religious. It pertains to things holy. It is concerned with the soul and with matters separate from perceived external reality.

The journey to the end of Stage 1 will require some assumptions about spirituality. The lead question: Is spirituality so intertwined with the sacred or the holy that it cannot exist otherwise? The phase proceeds with the assumption that spirituality is associated with God and may be expressed only in ways that honor him. If you are willing to continue, read on.

a. Spiritual Awakening. Given our physical nature, the mind is occupied with matters pertaining to the material world and to matters of survival on our planet. The mind is given to concerns of how to make a living, how to protect oneself, and how to experience momentary pleasure. The mind is also the seat of human consciousness and the conscience itself. It senses right and wrong. It entertains acts of kindness and acts of evil. It can also conceive of ultimate reality—life beyond the grave.

The natural man. That essence of man that is drawn toward physical inducements is known as the "natural man." This natural man is preoccupied with the pleasures of the flesh and seeks gratification of base human desires. Something fundamentally different is observed in the person who is attracted toward spiritual interests. Paul contrasts the natural man with the unnatural man, giving substance to the idea that flesh and spirit lie in contrast to each other ([1 Corinthians 2:6-16](#)). A spiritual awakening comes from man's positive response to the sacred.

While spiritual awakening has a relationship with the sacred, it is also dependent upon one's conscious decision to pursue it. A rich man once asked Jesus, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus responded, "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." When the man further inquired, saying he had been diligent to keep those basic commandments of the Law of Moses, Jesus instructed him to sell his possessions, give to poor, and follow him. The young man left sad, because he had great wealth. The incident revealed three things about what one's attitude should be toward God, who is the embodiment of good. One, he expects full allegiance. Two, a total spiritual commitment requires divestiture of all that militates against that allegiance. And three, salvation is indeed possible with God. Read [Matthew 19:16-30](#) and write a summary on the three things revealed in the text.

b. Spiritual elements. Christians and non-Christians share common qualities—love, empathy, trust, thankfulness, dependency, humility, and loyalty. There is truly a sense in which these common qualities are “spiritual.” They reflect values derived from innate capacities of mankind—values that carry qualities endowed by God. The boundary line between the secular and the sacred is not that the sacred admits none of the things found in man’s innate tendencies toward good, but in the basis or foundation of goodness. Actually, that basis exists, whether the human recognizes it or not. One may act with kindness, for example, but at the same time deny the God who placed that capacity within him. Therefore, by our definition, a person may be kind but if he does not know God, he is not “spiritual.”

Admitting the sacred. The initial stage in spirituality comes with an admission of the existence of the sacred component. But spirituality is more than recognizing that God has empowered us with a sense of good. Spirituality embraces an appropriate response to God, not for the innate endowment, but for who he is and what he has done, principally in human sanctification.

The idea of the sacred extends far beyond common human feelings. Neither alone nor together, do these feelings convey or constitute the full experience of worship.

Ritual. Spirituality may be associated with ritual, but spirituality and ritual are not synonymous. Both belong to the sphere of religion. Both are concerned with acknowledging the presence and activity of God. Spirituality as a state or process of reflecting the image of God may employ ritual to express feelings of the worshiper. Ritual is a vehicle employed by the spiritual man. That ritual is specified by God and revealed in Scripture. Otherwise, no matter how spiritual one may feel, one runs the risk of offering will-worship, if the ritual is self-motivated ([Colossians 2:16-23](#)).

Faith. Worship recognizes a sense of reliance on God. This sense is accompanied by a feeling of unworthiness (see Isaiah 6) and utter sinfulness and powerlessness before him. This dependency has a unique quality. This quality is illustrated by the biblical story of Abraham, who recognized his inferior position when he pleaded with God relative to Sodom: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). Abraham acknowledged hesitation, but it was the sense of being weighed down by his own lack of standing before God that set the experience apart from the common human emotions.

The lack of standing in the presence of deity or one’s own sense of worthlessness in the presence of an overwhelming, supreme God produces a sense that is so overpowering that one is at a loss to know how to proceed. It all rises from the person of God, whose person defies reduction to words. He is surmised through one’s personal consciousness. What places the emotion in the category of the “spiritual” is that it has reference to one who belongs essentially to the non-material sphere. That person is God.

c. Expressing the inner spirit. Spirituality has both an inner and an outer shell. What lies within the person is the real spiritual man (cf. [Proverbs 23:6-7](#)). That is why Christians are urged to think on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8). What comes out and is shown to the world is but an expression of that real spiritual quality that forms the character of the person.

There are some spiritual qualities that are best held on the inside. Jesus spoke of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting as matters one should do with good conscious, but not for public show. But the nature of spirituality will not allow one to conceal those values that accrue from the spiritual encounter. As a matter of course, the spiritual may be expressed outwardly through two means: one direct and the other indirect.

In reality, spirituality is “caught, not taught.” The proper terminology to describe how spirituality passes into the heart of another evades us. Religious concepts can be passed to succeeding generations by way of formal and informal instruction. Religious feelings can only be aroused. Despite the need to teach others about God, there must be some kind of spiritual awakening within the individual (see Jeremiah 31). Ritual and symbolism may assist, but they are neither a substitute nor a guarantee that true spirituality will result. Spirituality must arise from within the person and must be claimed as his own.

The expression of the inward spirit depends on correct knowledge for insight and development. One

cannot assume that the full display of spiritual traits comes automatically with baptism and the gift of Holy Spirit. Spiritual traits have to be “cultivated,” with the help of the Spirit of God. This implies they must be known first. Knowledge of what is spiritual and what is not spiritual comes from revelation, from the Bible, although the expression of man’s spiritual impulses may be expressed through the media of art and music.

Art. Human art form allows the human mind to create impressions that cannot be expressed adequately in words. Oriental art is especially adept in non-verbal expression. Through the use of darkness, silence, and empty space, the art form allows for the painter to convey the idea of contemplation and to fill the painting with empty spaces in order to create the void that speaks in negative terms of the opposite of the material world.

Music. Music stimulates emotions within the human frame that do not require words but can hardly be explained. David played music to sooth King Saul so the evil spirit would depart from him (1 Samuel 16:23). Juduthun prophesied with a harp (1 Chronicles 25:3). The psalmist praised God with the harp (Psalm 33:2; 43:4).

Like art, music has the capacity to arouse a variety of feelings within the human form that enables man to express himself in ways that mere words cannot. And, music can awaken within the human breast sensations that cannot be described. It can arouse feelings of glee and sadness; it can cause introspection and resolve. The spiritual experience may not always be evoked by music, but the feelings one derives from music give one something with which to compare the two.

Consider the Psalms, on which Christian hymnology is based. Hymn content resides apart from feelings. Spiritual songs may reflect on human events, but they are rooted in the holiness of God. They reflect life occurrences in view of the person of God is and his activity. The similarities to life experiences and to human emotions are present, for this is the only way the human can experience the spiritual. But the worship experience itself is not to be equated with a feeling of uplift related to the mundane secular life.

Spirituality is manifest in attitude, manner, and behavior. It will be seen through the places one goes and the habits one imbibes. It is revealed through the wording of prayers and comments in the assembly of worship. This is illustrated by Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” Read [John 3](#) and write your reflections on the chapter.

Sensation aroused by music, the taste of good food, and the arousal of the sex urge belong to the non-rational. In fact, over-eating the tasty food may go against what one knows in his mind is best for his health. Sexual urges may carry one beyond the bounds of the morality one has set for himself—not because he is listening to his brain but to his emotions. Yet in themselves, none of these are moral or immoral, spiritual or unspiritual. What makes over-eating a violation of spiritual principles is over indulgence—which within itself is a matter of judgment. In sexual urges, humans act in keeping with a natural process. Sex within marriage is a proper place for sexual practice. The unspiritual dimension is determined by the nature of illicit sexual unions. Read [1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#), where fornication is said to be against Christ, and write your thoughts on the passage.

The first stage of the journey (Module 1) is now complete. You have reached this point by affirming it is reasonable to believe in the spirit world, which includes God and Satan; without rational interaction, man has no capacity for spirituality. Furthermore, it is reasonable to believe that God has revealed himself to man through the Bible and that encounter with the sacred is necessary for spirituality to occur.

You are now ready for Stage 2 (Module 2). Stage 2 is given to a consideration of the sacred. To continue your journey, you must be willing to entertain the thought that the sacred brings an overwhelming sense of awe, majesty, empowerment, and passion, that it brings a sense of mystery in view of the nature of

God, his purposes, and promises, and it brings an element of fascination, with its own attraction or repulsion.

MODULE **2** A Sense of the Sacred

If the "sacred" is relegated to the non-physical realm, then it follows that all that is within the physical realm is "secular" and "profane." This appears to be a convenient way of conceptualizing the two. Yet, it does not conform to reality, for even in the physical realm, an intermingling with the spirit realm occurs. Since the mind conceives and experiences both the secular and the sacred, it would be a mistake to remove the sacred from the realm of human experience, unless the nature of the sacred itself so excludes it. This is not to say there is no distinction between the physical and non-physical or between the secular and the sacred. It is to say they are not mutually exclusive.

In the days of early Christianity, men debated whether Jesus could have been fully human and fully divine. Since human categories found it difficult to accommodate the intermingling of the two, theories were spun as to how the incarnation of Jesus could occur. Some rationalized that Jesus only "appeared" to be human, when in reality he was divine. Some argued that Jesus was only half human and half divine. And so the controversy continued. Although not binding as revelation, Christians in the early centuries generally concluded Jesus was fully human and fully divine. This was but a human attempt to rationalize a phenomenon which could not be explained through the use of human categories. It points to the difficulty of analyzing all existence through human rationalization.

Holding belief in the non-material sphere is not one and the same thing as having experienced it. One can conceive of the holy without participating in it. Spirituality requires some connection between the world of the senses and the world of the spirit. A spiritual consciousness has to be provoked. And one has to have some engagement in sacred matters.

Whatever explanation we may offer to explain the sacred and the proper response the human should make to it must be understood against the background of Scripture. Spirituality cannot operate of its own volition. Otherwise, it would be a matter of human ingenuity, created out of human rationalization. And each person's definition of spirituality would stand against that of everyone else. There must be a standard for judging both spirituality and the sacred. That standard we take to be the Bible. If the Bible fails the test and yields conflicting, irrational concepts about the subject, then we are left to ask, What better standard is there?

Stage 2 of the journey explores the idea of the sacred or holy as an essential basis for spirituality. Encounter with the sacred brings a sense of wonder, mystery, and fascination. Shall we continue?

Unit 1. An Overwhelming Sense

While core ingredients of spirituality are faith, hope, and love, the essence of the religious experience (*i.e.*, the sacred) lies in something other than a purely rational comprehension. It has to be enveloped in sensations, which are processed by the brain. But these sensations carry one beyond those which one meets in everyday life. A "spiritual experience" offers an overwhelming sense, a state of mind that is anything but mundane. The sense of the sacred is not the joy one feels at receiving something precious. It is not the gratification one receives at winning an athletic contest. It is not even the emotion one has when a loved one is embraced after a long absence. On the other hand, this experience with the sacred is not an out-of-the-body occurrence. It is one of awe, wonder, and gripping angst.

The idea of the sacred may be conceived in the human mind, but it is not a product of the mind. The sacred exists apart from the mind and pre-dates all human experience. The fact that absoluteness and goodness may be conceived does not mean they are the creations of the human mind. The mind merely recognizes what already exists.

When a person entertains the spiritual realm in the sense of confrontation with God, that person is not becoming non-rational but is becoming open to a side of life that is sacred. He gives values to spiritual entities that do not belong to normal everyday routine. In so doing, he becomes the single claimant of those experiences. The question to be answered: Does the sacred overwhelm one in ways which the secular does not?

As we proceed, a point to keep in mind is that one cannot successfully deny spirituality on the supposition that it cannot be demonstrated scientifically. However, faith is not irrational. It is not against reason. It does indeed include both sensation and rationality. Just as emotions exist and cannot be proved by the scientific method, mere denial of the spiritual realm is insufficient to dismiss it.

a. The aspect of awe. In the normal life cycle, everyone experiences fear. Fear ignites a sense of horror, dread, and anxiety when a person's health or life is endangered. Fear is evoked when the inborn desire for self-preservation and protection from harm is threatened. It brings a feeling of vulnerability. As a result of a fear-laden experience, one may react in one of three ways. (1) One may be driven to despair and retreat from that which induced the fear. (2) One may become indifferent to the dangers and continue to take the same risks as before. Or (3), one may learn to respect what initiated the fear.

In the spiritual realm, a similar response may occur when one confronts God. (1) One may be driven into a state of terror and remain unrepentant. (2) One may become indifferent to the plight of being unworthy to stand before God. Or (3) one may respond with awe and commitment to God.

The fear of God. The fear of God originates from God's person. When the human being recognizes God's sovereignty, the immediate response is to be apprehensive in view of what a sovereign being might do to the less powerful human being. Part of this alarm is due to a lack of understanding of the nature of God. If God acts as a hungry lion in the Kenyan wild, then terror is evoked because we believe him to be self-serving and indifferent to any particular human's plight. A second reason why a human may fear God is because he knows God to be holy and that he pours out his wrath against unrighteousness.

The thought of God produces different emotions in the believer and the unbeliever in matters spiritual and unspiritual. For the believer, God's person stands against evil and only God can control evil. To the unbeliever, the thought of God brings a frightening moment when he realizes he is held accountable for his unbelief and evil acts. While the fear of God that comes upon the believer differs qualitatively from the fear that comes upon an unbeliever, they both share the feeling of utter helplessness and inadequacy in the presence of the Almighty.

Reflection 2-1. In the New Testament we read of a city that was so enamored of the presence of the divine that in addition to idols to many gods scattered about the city, somewhere in the city a statue had been erected "To an Unknown God." Read Acts 17:15-34. (1) What was the point of Paul's speech? (2) Reflect on how you would have reacted if you had been there on Mars Hill listening to him speak.

The wrath of God. The wrath of God is disconcerting and incomprehensible to all who hold that the goodness and love of God preclude his jealousy and wrath. They fail to realize that the wrath of God suggests the triumph of holiness and judgment on immoral conduct. This part of the nature of God is as much a part of his essence as holiness and goodness.

We commonly speak of the wrath of God in the tsunami, the hurricane, the earthquake, the volcano, the thunderstorm, and in the spread of an uncontrollable disease. These are natural phenomena. People who have little concern for God commonly use terms like "the wrath of God" or "an act of God." Whether one

recognizes it or not, there comes to most people a sense of supernatural power and utter dependency upon God during the outbreak of all "acts of God." But the idea of the wrath of God appears in the Bible within a different context. For example, the ancient Israelites, whose lives were ordered by a covenant with God, understood the wrath of God as natural phenomena associated with the lack of holiness.

A sense of awe. The sense of horror that strikes one who anticipates God is but one side of the response. One is also struck with a sense of awe. The awe one experiences in his spiritual quest may be overwhelming on the one hand and comforting on the other. Peace with God is a sober thought; it can be a comforting reality. One's inward spirit may be spellbound, but it appreciates the worshipful "Holy, holy, holy." A sense of awe enables the creature to live with himself and with God. His own sense of worthlessness and distance from God acquiesces.

Human language reserves a few terms for use in expressing the aspect of awe. These terms are inappropriate when addressing the human being, for they tend to exalt man to a position that should be reserved for God. Words such as "august," "omnipotent," and "sovereign," expressions such as "Oh, my God!" or "My Goodness," and religious titles such as "Reverend," "Father," and "His holiness" should be laid aside from human parlance in preference for more appropriate ones. To bestow on man an honor that is fitting only for God tends to dilute the sacred and elevate man to an untenable position. Likewise, a human should refrain from exercising prerogatives that belong to God alone-spiritual judgments, for example.

b. The majesty of God. Beyond the sense of awe that is produced from an overpowering feeling, spirituality introduces one to a sense of "majesty." Majesty denotes a sense of impressive stateliness associated with royalty. Thus, we observe something that is awesome, imposing, marvelous, magnificent, and splendid. But none of these words describe adequately the majesty connected to the idea imbedded in authentic spirituality. Since God is beyond anything that man can comprehend, "spirituality" can hardly be captured by human vocabulary. However, within the human consciousness emerges a glimpse of divinity and the unequalled stateliness that the idea of majesty suggests. In this setting, one begins to realize that there is more to life than meets the eye and that eternal, unfading elements lie beyond the profane.

At the physical level, the human knows something of splendor and grandeur in natural wonders and human achievements. One marvels at the sunset, deep canyon, roaring river, and thunderstorm. One is amazed at the pyramids, skyscrapers, and space age technologies. Natural wonders testify to the power of God and magnificent structures testify to the achievements of man. In their own way, these point to the majesty of God, but in no sense can they approach the eternal magnificence that provokes honor, praise, and adoration in the believer's heart. Only through the realization of the awe-inspiring nature of God can one begin to fathom the majesty of his being.

What one comes to acknowledge regarding the majesty of God opens the possibility of knowing God himself. Through a "new birth," which God enables, one can have a living hope through Jesus' resurrection. The Christian anticipates an eternal inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Herein one experiences inexpressible and glorious joy at receiving the end of his faith (1 Peter 1:3-12). Here one realizes that flesh fades away as does the flower and the grass (1 Peter 1:24-25). The majesty of God provides the milieu for spirituality.

c. The aspect of empowerment and passion. In addition to the sense of awe and splendor that comes from the sacred experience is an element of vigor and passion. One is simultaneously empowered to do the will of God and moved with urgency to perform his will. There always remains the reality of divine judgment for slothfulness, neglect, and deliberate sin. But an awareness of being a spiritual son or daughter of God replaces fear of dread and terror with awe.

Spirituality takes one beyond a static belief in God. It is not confined to an activity of the mind but propels one into action. Spirituality drives one from the thinker's stance to that of the runner. One is simultaneously enamored with God's saving power and energized to redirect energies toward spiritual causes. For example, one may study hard and long to amass the most complete view of the nature of

God as is humanly possible and yet be an unspiritual person. There must dwell deep within the person's soul a sense of connection with the divine. When this sense is present, there will inevitably be an outpouring of emotion. The emotion need not be demonstrated in some extraordinary form, but it will be evident to others that the person is a spiritually-alive individual.

The aspect of empowerment and passion that resides in solid spirituality could very well describe the difference between those who are second generation Christians from those who are first generation believers. Those of the first generation in the 1st century were driven by passion to tell the story of Jesus to those who had no knowledge of it. Men like the apostle Paul dedicated their lives to this end. But not all carried their enthusiasm forward. The disciples at Laodicea grew indifferent ([Revelation 3:14-22](#)); those at Ephesus lost their first love ([Revelation 2:1-7](#)). The reason for writing many of the epistles was to encourage Christians to remain faithful and fervent.

Unit 2. A Sense of Mystery

We may "encounter" God in the physical plane through the beauty and ravages of nature, but a more penetrating view is to be found in the spiritual encounter. We are not implying here what is often called Mysticism, but yet an encounter that is inscrutable. The encounter with God is not an out-of-this-world experience, and yet it is not totally explainable.

In approaching the unexplainable encounter with the spirit realm, we should begin with God, not with man. To begin with man would be to admit that God can be found through human reason alone and that knowledge of the unseen realm is limited to human reason. To commence with God, on the other hand, is to recognize that we are taking into account the totality of the universe and not with just the created part. At once, we face the unfamiliar--that which cannot be measured by brain power. While God himself cannot be reduced to human vocabulary and thought categories, something of the mystery surrounding him can be opened for human viewing through analyzing his purposes and promises as revealed in the Bible.

Before proceeding with the idea of spirituality, we must pause and lay out some assumptions. The assumptions are crucial to the quest. Either there is a God or there is not. God is either knowable to man or he is not. God is either the creator or he is not. God is either distinct from man or he is not. God either has an interest in his creation or he does not. God either involves himself with his creation or he does not. God either has a purpose for the universe or he does not. God is either stronger than Satan or he is not. If we affirm the positive side of the "either-or" statements, we have a basis for pursuing the question of spirituality. To pursue the negative side is to reduce the pursuit to purely human rational categories. The sacred carries with it a sense of mystery.

a. The "Wholly Other." The term "Wholly Other" has been used in recent decades to describe God. God lies beyond our ability to understand totally, for we are captive to the physical universe. As "wholly other," he is just that--wholly other than what we know and can fully experience. He is uniquely different from humanity. Not only is he different, he is intrinsically superior, so much so that the human can only wilt in his presence.

The idea of a "wholly other" evokes feeling and emotion within the human consciousness, even for the person who is not a believer. All of us experience a sense of awe and mystery when confronted with something new and unfamiliar. What is it? Where did it come from? What does it mean? But in the context of spirituality, human language does not do justice to any description of the person of God. God is transcendent, immaterial, and can only be tentatively compared with familiar human traits. In fact, God appears as much in contrast with the physical as he seems similar to the physical. The outcome for the human is utter amazement.

The human brain conceives the thought of the sacred, as defined by God's person; feelings interact with it. Spirituality is hardly an intellectual exercise, though it is not unreasonable. However, the experiences

of the spiritual cannot be totally understood or conveyed in words. There is more to man than reason and logic. Knowledge and understanding are distinguished in the physical realm; so it is in the spiritual realm.

The Bible does open some portals through which one may peer to catch a glimpse of the Almighty. And one is given a sense of revealed mystery through its pages. The apostle Paul referred to God's work as a mystery--a mystery now revealed ([Ephesians 3:2-6](#)). He also spoke of having a peace of God that passes understanding ([Philippians 4:7](#)).

b. The purposes of God. It is reasonable to think of God as a Being of purpose. As surely as the creation was no accident, so the destiny of that creation is governed by purpose. This is not to say that everything is predetermined, but it is to say that the consummation of all things within the physical and metaphysical universe will be according to the will of God. Otherwise, God is either not sovereign or he does not care about what he created. In both cases, the universe is speeding aimlessly toward an uncertain conclusion. When God is left out of the equation, all we have is accidental occurrence, where non-intelligence reigns. If non-intelligence is responsible for the universe, then it seems foolish to apply human intelligence to try to figure it out.

God's intentions precede the material universe. Some of those purposes may be visible to us through the created order. We may say humans, plants, animals, birds, and other creatures live on earth according to God's purpose. The earth revolves on its axis according to God's purpose. Seasons change in keeping with God's will. But we must look to revelation to discover something of his eternal purpose relative to man's spiritual state.

The apostle Paul presents it quite succinctly in [Ephesians 1:4](#): For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. God's purpose, then, is that his human creatures come to know him in holiness, *i.e.*, in a spiritual relationship. He moves in the universe to guarantee the ultimate fulfillment of his will. As a God of purpose, the Creator sustains his universe. In doing so, he makes provisions whereby those purposes can be realized, when neither man nor any other creature is capable of doing so.

Reflection 2-2. Before moving on, read [Hebrews 11:1-12:4](#) and reflect on this passage as it relates to the purpose of God. **What is the major theme of the passage?**

c. The promises of God. The purposes of God have been revealed to man through Scripture. Within the confines of Scripture, we hear of promises God has made to humankind. We are told that the rainbow is his sign in the heavens that "never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life" ([Genesis 9:8-16](#)). God promised Abraham that through him, "all peoples on earth will be blessed" ([Genesis 12:3](#)). God himself guaranteed these and other promises; he swore by his own name or holiness to their trustworthiness (cf. [Amos 4:2](#); [Acts 7:17](#)). These passages are testimony to the highest authority in the universe.

It is one thing to observe the sunrise and sunset day after day and conclude that the cycle will continue without end. But this is a mere observation of nature, not a "promise." God's promises are communicated. How? To whom? When? From the witness of the Bible, "In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" ([Hebrews 1:1-2](#)).

Paul spoke of a heavenly wisdom that had been hidden but "destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Then he quotes a passage from [Isaiah 64:4](#): "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." He adds, "but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" ([1 Corinthians 2:6-10](#)).

We may conclude from these passages that God has not left us without hope and without

assurance. How would we know if a particular path leads to victory? In what could we possibly ground our convictions? Man's word is often unreliable, for he forgets the past and cannot know the future. Even if he could know the future, he is not able to control it. By admitting to God's presence and sovereignty, we are able to develop faith and have assurance.

Unit 3. The Element of Fascination

As human beings, we are encapsulated in a physical world. Much of our energy is spent surviving, with eating, sleeping, working, and recreating consuming most of our time. Being absorbed in the pursuits of the secular world tends to make one oblivious to the sublime. The safety net is a consciousness of performing these activities with a moral compass.

Some people find great pleasure in their work or in their play. The gratification they receive continues to call them to repeat the fulfilling experiences. This is especially true with those momentary pleasures that lead to addictions. For these people, the sacred may hold little appeal, because it has not been explored, or it sounds too esoteric, or one loves the secular more than the sacred.

It is one thing to admit the existence of a spiritual realm. It is another to respond to that realm with either fear or awe. It is still another thing to embrace the spiritual. In one sense, a person can ignore the spiritual realm. In another sense, one cannot, for each is held responsible for personal actions.

If one can only grasp the significance of the supernatural, one will become fascinated with it. Part of that fascination is due to the freedom it offers--freedom from the guilt that sin lays on a person, freedom from the burdens brought about by greed, envy, and self-centeredness, freedom from feeling one must return evil for evil. In other words, the spiritual becomes attractive, because it provides a framework in which one can live in the secular realm without becoming enslaved to it. It offers a more legitimate means to approach life's essential activities and the people with whom we have to deal. It fills one's life with more meaning and purpose. We proceed with the idea that the sacred is an active force that offers unimagined benefits.

a. Attraction and repulsion. While the idea of the sacred holds attraction to some, it repulses others. For the spiritually inclined, the sacred is fascinating, as it holds the possibility of knowing God. The seeker gravitates to the sacred, for here he finds meaning, fulfillment, comfort, goodness, salvation, and freedom. On the other hand, the natural man is repelled, because he sees the sacred as an infringement upon his pleasures. He is inclined to remain firm in unbelief and denial. When confronted with the sacred, one cannot remain neutral.

The mystery of the sacred claims one's attention, not as an irresistible force, but as a humbling, submissive, desirable, inviting blessing. Within this spiritual arena, one knows that imperfect faith, hope, and love are complete in the spiritual realm. Here, these entities are not defined by society; neither is one left to do as he thinks right in his own eyes. These elements are inherently part of the character of God and, hence, are standards of behavior for the entire universe--both material and spiritual.

In reality, the human comprehension of a jealous God who exercises wrath is but a part of the full measure of God. So, too, the complete concept of God's love, grace, and mercy is an extension of what man may conceive and appreciate. The singing of hymns, engagement in lament, fervent prayer, and shouts of adoration become vehicles through which the human reaches up to God and expresses the best the human can offer. This is the closest the human can come on earth to experiencing the spiritual side of heaven.

One is encouraged toward spirituality through observing it in the lives of other persons. Just as one may be drawn into evil through association with evil-intended people, so one may be influenced to walk in goodness through watching the spiritually minded.

The threat of judgment can also prompt a person toward spirituality. Fear of judgment comes from realizing the serious condition that faces the unbeliever ([Acts 2:37](#); [17:29-31](#)). But as a sense of the majesty replaces terror through faith and baptism, a feeling of the holy overcomes the love for the profane.

Reflection 2-3. In moments of ecstasy, one finds oneself drawn toward the holy. One's feelings are supported by the mind. The unspiritual person has no capacity to appreciate the spiritual exercises of the soul. His eyes may see others engage in worship and his ears may hear their songs, but he has no comprehension of the significance of the activities. Worship is repulsive to his nature. He has no appreciation for the Christian story of redemption. The spiritual man, on the other hand, finds the natural world empty, disgusting, pitiful. Because the natural man lacks spiritual insight, he views the sacred through secular lenses. Consider the parable that demonstrates the different responses men give to the gospel ([Matthew 13:1-23](#)). **Describe the different responses.**

Reflection 2-4. The spiritual person is drawn toward God especially in moments of private devotion, reflection, and meditation, when his mind is clear of the mundane. Likewise, in a public worship service, the spiritual person is drawn into the company of likeminded people. This is most pronounced in a time of persecution. In a gathering of believers following detention, threats, and the release of Peter and John, the worshipers "raised their voices together in prayer to God." They recognized God's sovereignty in creation and in redemption. Their request was, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" ([Acts 4:23-31](#)). Not every occasion may be so marked, but the idea of what should happen when people assemble remains. The sense of having been redeemed and having been made a partner with God in his work sets aside the fear of men and reinforces the conviction that the work of God should go forward. The assembly provides the crucible in which this takes place. **Write your thoughts about what should happen when people assemble.**

b. A change of allegiance. Spirituality makes use of the same feelings that the unspiritual person possesses. The difference lies in the stimulus. The natural person loves for reasons inherently derived. For example, a mother's love for her child is instinctive. She will feed, clothe, teach, and protect the child. She will weep over the child in times of difficult times, hurt with the child when injured, and discipline the child to train it. Normally, her love is unconditional. She loves the child while in formation, at birth, in childhood, and in adulthood. Nothing can separate her affections for her own flesh and blood.

Even though the capacity for love may be inherent, people can choose to love conditionally or to hate. Conditional love may come from a sense of embarrassment. For example, a child may convert to another religion. Feeling the loss of honor, the parents may disown the child. Or, if a child marries someone the family disapproves, the family may cut the child out of the family inheritance. Or again, an employee may respect his boss and manifest a disposition of honor and appreciation as long as his boss favors him with a job and periodic raises. Once the job is gone, he may turn against the boss and seek his harm.

Others may simply choose a hateful disposition, which may be an outgrowth of conditional love. To love those who love you and hate those who hate is a mark of the low life. It is an outward manifestation of an evil heart. It points to self-centeredness and is destructive (cf. [Matthew 5:38-48](#)).

The spiritual road is one where personal interests give way to the interests of others--to the higher good. This disposition derives from God, who is love. God loves us even while we are sinners. That does not mean he approves of our unrighteousness. It does mean he cares for us and did so to the point that he gave his Son to die on a cross to bring about human redemption. When a person is drawn to this Son and finds the rationale for love in the supreme act of God, then one finds spirituality. As long as one remains in the natural state, one is deprived of the higher path to forgiveness and freedom.

Spirituality does not support the idea that the spiritual man has been changed intellectually or that his senses have somehow been altered. His change of allegiance from self to God has made the difference in his person. The important difference is the change in character that follows the change of allegiance. The difference is seen in one's thoughts, speech, conduct, manner, and worship activity. He now has a

relationship with God.

Of free will, a person acts to do what is appropriate to his position as a child of God. By recognizing one's sinfulness before God and one's inability to rid oneself of the guilt of sin, one moves toward God by acting upon God's invitation to forgiveness. He can find it in no other way.

c. How is one drawn to the sacred? The full answer to the question lies beyond our comprehension. However, an interesting passage occurs in John 6:44, where Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." If anything, the passage implies that man does not find spirituality on his own terms. Within its context, the specific point being made is that salvation is initiated by God and that Jesus is the one through whom God draws people to a redeemed life. The occasion was the resistance to Jesus by unbelievers.

Several approaches have been made to the question of how one is drawn to the sacred. There has been a long-standing idea that before creation God predetermined which individuals would be saved and which ones would be damned to hell. Some have attempted to protect God by saying that all people deserve to go to hell, and all God did was to pick some to go to heaven. Others, however, project that the destiny of all humans is arbitrary. Either position creates a dilemma for God, as it makes him arbitrary and diminishes his character as far as man is concerned. The New Testament is content to affirm the sovereignty of God. It declares his love to be universal and holds humans responsible for their response to God's act of redemption in Christ. The tendency of human thought is to work out details and go beyond the biblical text. In doing so, the essence of biblical thought is often neglected or negated.

God's sovereignty is not in question. What is in question is God's acts. Does he draw people who are responding in faith or people who are resisting him? Has he predestined individuals apart from their faith or is he saving people who are made righteous through Christ and who conform to his image?

When dealing with the sacred, one must take into account the New Testament declaration of Satan's influence and the Christian's ongoing struggle against principalities and powers. The Bible--from the Gospels through the Epistles to the Apocalypse--maintains that Christ is the victor over the powers of Satan. At the end of the age, Satan will be banished. Until then, humans must live in a world where tension exists between the two forces. Satan, though banished from heaven, possesses tremendous pull in one's life and is determined to keep others from enjoying spiritual communion with God.

Many passages in the New Testament deal with warnings about apostasy, carelessness, and outright denial of the faith. Humans are not given the prerogative to declare that those who apostatize were never among the elect. That is the prerogative of God alone. All indications are that one is drawn to the sacred. To say that man--be that of his own hard heart, from a state of fear, from a satisfaction with his own lifestyle, or under the influence of Satan--has no right of refusal, makes man a puppet and denies human free-will. To say that God or Christ has no part in drawing men toward the sacred makes man the initiator of his own salvation, which is incongruous with the Scriptures. In the end, we are left with the wonderful idea that man can be drawn into communion with God.

When you have completed the Reflections and *Imitation of Christ*, move on to Module 3.

MODULE **3** Spirituality Actualized

Spirituality demands a context. From a biblical point of view, spirituality is not something that simply overwhelms an individual. It may be incited by inner self introspection and meditation. It may be prompted by a near-death experience. But neither meditation nor crises automatically leads one into spirituality. Spirituality is linked with being "in Christ." Or, as Paul puts it, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"

(2 Cor. 5:17).

If spirituality is "actualized" through Christ, then what does this mean? In the simplest form, spiritual engagement means that one has made a conscious decision to surrender his natural life to God through acting upon the invitation of the gospel. When one hears the gospel of Jesus Christ, he must make a decision. Either he believes the record or he rejects it. This is the first step toward spirituality.

One initiates his spiritual journey prior to becoming a Christian. Unlike a popular position that denies man the ability to respond to God due to an inherited sin from Adam, the New Testament teaches that man is capable of responding to the gospel. Peter pleaded with the multitude on Pentecost, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized ([Acts 2:40-41](#)). Clearly, spirituality is possible for all who seek God through Jesus Christ.

Stage 3 of the journey is about to begin. It is concerned with the attainment of a spiritual relationship with God. In beginning this phase, you need to make a decision. Do I want to entertain the proposition that spirituality can be actualized? Along the way, you will be asked to make other decisions relative to examining the possibility that realizing a sense of alienation from God is requisite to spirituality; that the avenue to spirituality is set by God himself; and that to attain it requires a response which God himself has set. Shall we continue?

Unit 1. A Sense of Alienation and Spiritual Need

A person's decision to pursue a spiritual relationship with God is aroused by a sense of alienation from God and the awareness of the need for redemption. Why would one pursue spirituality if one did not feel separated from God? How can one respond to God's offer of spiritual blessing if one does not realize a need for it? One must experience a sense of being lost, empty, and hopeless. This sensation presses onto a person's consciousness a circumstance that has no human way out.

The key to understanding alienation and spiritual need develops out of a comprehension of the hideousness of sin. Sin is a concept that has no meaning apart from the world of the sacred. It is defined negatively in contrast to the nature of God. Humans are informed of sin by revelation and perceive of it through the human conscience. Within man, there appears to be a general sense of right and wrong. But man only knows the full scope of right and wrong through revelation.

There is no reason for people to be unaware of sin. Even if they are reared in a society that teaches and reinforces the idea that sin is old fashioned, that it is superstitious, or that it is a figment of imagination, their reasoning goes against logic. Each individual is constructed in a manner that teaches him/her that there is a distinction between right and wrong. They may not know the details of wrong actions according to biblical scripture, but they are aware of the concept by natural means. Otherwise, all restraints would vanish and human life would not be bearable.

The first phase of Stage 3 asks for a decision regarding the reality of sin and its consequences in prohibiting spirituality. The discussion assumes a sense of alienation is necessary before one can experience spirituality.

a. Sin. *Are you willing at this point to consider the idea of sin? Are you willing to look at the probability that sin is a grave matter? Are you willing to concede, at least for discussion purposes, that coping with sin cannot be done by meditation, obedience to legal prescriptions, or appeasement through sacrifice or ritual? If so, read on.*

The word most commonly used to designate the means by which one becomes unholy and alienated from God is "sin." The natural man takes sin lightly, for it calls into question his behavior and thoughts. It is more of an annoyance than a problem. Some people dismiss the severity of "sin," calling it a "disease" or "addiction," or "accident." Hence, the blame is moved from the individual to a substance or situation.

But, as spiritually inclined people know, sin is a much larger item and carries severe consequences, unless the blight is eradicated.

Within a legal environment, sin may be defined as breaking the law. But Jesus made it clear that an attitude of heart may be just as condemning (Matthew 5:21-30). Sin occurs when one neglects to do the good he knows he ought to do (James 4:17). Sin implies "missing the mark."

Man has three alternatives regarding sin: ignore it, justify it, or seek a remedy for it. Ignoring sin leads to spiritual death just as ignoring cancer in the physical body leads to physical death. Seeking to "justify" sin by shifting the blame elsewhere is like having lung cancer and blaming it on the tobacco industry; you still have the cancer. The only viable alternative remaining is to seek a remedy; that is, find the cure.

Take a moment to reflect on your own circumstance. You need not disclose your personal feelings to anyone else. Simply take some time to deal with your inner feelings with respect to what might be called sinful. Face the fact that, unless you are perfect, you are sinful.

b. A sense of alienation. *Now for the next decision, you are asked to think about the sense of alienation. Are you willing to look deep within yourself to determine if there does exist within a sense of alienation from God? If not, the following will have little meaning for you. But you may continue, nevertheless.*

Alienation is a state in which one is estranged from another. It is where hostility exists. In alienation, one feels isolation, separation, and distant from another being. The sensation is unsettling enough when two human beings are emotionally overwhelmed because one has not acted in good faith toward the other. But when one comes to realize personal alienation from God, the feeling is total helplessness. The feeling need not produce despair, for the sense of being estranged from God is prerequisite to reconciliation.

At what point in one's life does one sense this alienation? For some, it comes quite early, when the child is old enough to know the difference between right and wrong and feels guilt before God for doing evil. This would rule out babies and exceptionally young children. It is a matter of judgment as to when a child's sense of doing wrong presents him/her with a moral dilemma that is more than the fear of parental punishment. During those growing up years, the child eventually comes to sense some sort of alienation from God.

It is possible for a person to live his or her whole adult life and never confront this spiritual need. Perhaps one is blinded to it. Perhaps one has lived in circumstances that overshadowed the spiritual side. Such circumstances do not eliminate the responsibility, but they can explain the lateness with which a person comes to experience the alienation and spiritual need

As in the preceding section, take time to reflect on what feelings you may entertain about the possibility of alienation from God.

c. Spiritual need. *Assuming you have admitted to having had a sense of alienation from God in the past or have such a feeling at present, are you willing to consider that this alienation has, either in the past, or at present has brought on a sense of spiritual need? Without laboring the point, the idea is that unless there is a sense of spiritual need, there can be no realization of spirituality. This condition presumes that a person moves toward spirituality because there is some spiritual void in that person's life.*

Unless sin has undesirable consequences, there is no sense of spiritual need. But, if alienated from God by sin is a serious matter, there is a spiritual "need," whether one recognizes it or not. The need assumes that man is accountable to God for his thoughts and conduct. Alienation from God is not a good thing.

Once one realizes sin must be confronted, how does one move toward resolution? One may assume that God has prescribed the remedy without assuming that he had predetermined whether or not one may have access to that remedy. If God is a God of love and sent Jesus to die for all people of the world, I will

assume that includes me. Any system that indiscriminately eliminates anyone from having access to the grace of God is not a good system.

Spiritual need is more than a "want." It is a dire necessity, created when man becomes self-seeking and attempts to live outside God's reach. One may assume that all of the physical needs are taken care of and not realize that his greater need is spiritual. One may acquire all the world has to offer and yet feel an emptiness in his heart. This emptiness can only be filled by knowing God, our maker.

To close this phase, reflect on your personal sense of spiritual need. Yearning for God is a natural feeling, much as feeling homesick when distanced from home and family.

A sense of alienation and spiritual need does not produce spirituality. Spirituality is dependent upon finding "redemption." It results from satisfying spiritual need and drawing near to God. Are you willing to pursue the subject of redemption?

Unit 2. Redemption

"Redemption" implies one is being bought back. In religious terms, the concept carries the idea that the one being redeemed was once whole and pure. Since that time, the person has strayed away and become lost. Redemption brings renewal.

We may assume man's purity at three historical points: (1) in the original creation, (2) at one's birth, and (3) in the redeemed state. The original pair had no sin at creation but were endowed with the capacity to sin. When they chose to sin, consequences followed ([Genesis 2:25-3:19](#); cf. [1 John 2:16](#)).

That one is pure at birth derives from what is assumed by the redemptive process. The entire scheme of redemption is built on the premise that each person is responsible for his own sins and for his own faith response. While we all suffer the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve, we do not bear the guilt of their sins. The consequences are a more difficult life than Adam and Eve once enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. But each person born after the original pair has faced the same choices and has made similarly bad decisions ([Romans 3:23](#)).

The redeemed state is where the condemnation brought on by breaking the law is removed ([Romans 8:1-2](#)). It is an actualized spirituality; it is not a guarantee of salvation to the redeemed person who later chooses an alternative faith or unspiritual behavior.

God's concern has not been for a few select persons, but for all of humanity. His choice of Israel was not to exclude others, but to use Israel to bring others to him. That thought is present in the promise God made to Abraham and is evident in the reasons God chose Israel to represent him to the world. The value of Christianity does not rest with its contributions to society but with an intrinsic value that it has because of its association with God.

The decision at this point pertains to a sense of the need for redemption. Is redemption a prerequisite to a spiritual life? Only the sense of being lost or alienated from God can lead to a sense of need for redemption or salvation. To continue, you need to be willing to explore the role of redemption in the actualization of spirituality.

a. The nature of redemption. "Redemption" in the religious sense is salvation, deliverance, release, liberation, and recovery. Theologically, the term narrows itself to the change in one's spiritual condition. Redemption became crucial because man's sin has alienated him from God. Due to God's holiness, something had to occur in order to rid man of sin and reconstitute him as holy.

Redemption begins with God. Given the nature of God and man, human sinfulness cannot be overcome by humans themselves. Redemption implies bringing man back to a standing with God that enables the

creature to engage God in the sacred realm. No matter how much one may try, no matter how many laws one may keep, no matter how many good deeds one may perform, no matter how fervently one may pray, a divine act has become necessary to produce redemption.

One of the more unfathomable concepts relative to redemption is the thought that God not only initiated it, but he did it in an unthinkable way. This is precisely what makes Christianity different from all other religious faiths. Some faiths begin with man and allow him to discover spirituality through human processes. Others believe God has revealed a set of laws to replace ones that have been lost. Only in the Bible do we find a divinely initiated redemptive process that has as its center piece the offering in sacrifice God's own Son. But this should not surprise us, given the nature of the sacred and the posture of God himself. The apostle Paul stated it well when he said, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . Christ Jesus . . . has become for us wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." Read [1 Corinthians 1:18-30](#).

b. God's purpose in redemption. If redemption begins with God, we should see in it God's actions. The same revelation that speaks of the possibility of redemption and presents its essence, declares it to be something that God conceived before eternity ([Ephesians 1:4](#); [3:11](#); [1 Peter 1:19](#)). He then set the process into action after the sin of Adam and Eve. He promised it to Abraham ([Gen. 12:1-4](#)), with a view to blessing the entire world ([Galatians 3:8](#)). What he did in sending Jesus into the world was to fulfill that eternal purpose.

The genius of the Genesis account of creation is not its scientific wonder, but its disclosure about the making of mankind. The opening chapter contains a rhythmic presentation of a balanced universe, ending with the crown of God's creation--humanity. The second chapter picks up the thought introduced at the conclusion of chapter one and amplifies on the making of woman. This, in turn, prepares the reader for the third chapter, which introduces the encounter with Satan and the sin that ruptured the relationship Adam and Eve had with God. By chapter 12, the need for redemption of those who came after Adam and Eve is evident. With Abraham, God's initiative in providing redemption becomes clear.

One may question why God made man, knowing he would sin and disgrace him. Only God can answer that question fully. From our vantage, the whole matter testifies to the character of God. Could God have made man so he would always be compliant with his will? Surely. The idea that God predetermined human redemption before the creative act suggests that the creation of man was intentional. Man did not surprise God. Rather, God surprised man!

Man, in his quest to operate as if he were the final authority, is shocked by the idea that God has entered into history through his Son in a move to redeem man. He would rather see God sitting in heaven with a big stick, just waiting to whack man when he goes astray. Or, if not that, man is resistant to the idea that God will judge him at all. Indeed, God's holiness leads to judgment on human behavior, but behind that judgment is a Holy One who longs for man's faithfulness and wholeness. His love propels him to actions beyond man's expectation and imagination. This is part of the mystery of God. This is why he is God and why he does not behave as humans are inclined to project. If he conformed to human perceptions, he would not be God at all.

Reflection 3-1. Contemplate the ideas written in [Romans 2:5-11](#). **What does the passage teach about accountability?**

c. Law and grace. *Herein lies a crucial fork in the road. To travel farther along the path, you must at least be agreeable to exploring the idea that a good standing with God cannot be achieved through self-identified activity, through meditation, through innate ethical behavior, through works of religious merit, or even through divinely defined ritual. Spiritual renewal is possible only through the grace of God. The belief system, ethical behavior, and religious ritual become only the avenue through which one demonstrates his faith and obedience to God. God alone establishes the process by which it shall take place. He does it in such a manner that man has no reason to claim credit for it. The process itself is set*

forth in the New Testament.

By God's design, law keeping had proven inadequate for man. We should understand that "law" within itself is neither good nor evil, albeit in God's laws, there is something good or holy ([Psalm 19:7-14](#); [Romans 7:12](#)). The problem with law keeping is not with the law; the problem is with humankind ([Romans 7:14](#)). Keeping legal prescriptions—even those from God—cannot save man. For this to happen, man would have to keep the laws of God perfectly. Otherwise, by breaking one law, one falls under condemnation as judged by the legal system ([James 2:10](#)). Either we are perfect, or we stand in need of grace.

Stipulations included under the New Covenant are not intended as laws by which one may justify oneself before God. Rather, they reveal the kind of life the spiritual person lives. When the Spirit is active in the life of the believer, the fruit of the Spirit is visible: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law" ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). Good deeds follow conversion; they are the natural response to God ([Ephesians 2:10](#)), but do not in themselves earn salvation. Rather than working to earn salvation, the Christian responds with thankfulness for the gift of salvation ([Ephesians 4:5](#)).

The point at issue here is how one is justified before God. If one cannot be justified by meditation, law keeping, or works of merit, how is it done? The way God has chosen to redeem man is through the death of his Son. This act calls for a specific response from each human being. In the beginning, Adam and Eve lived in perfect relationship with God. When they sinned, they lost a degree of relationship. As a human race, we have sinned and lost the highest level of our relationship with God. Only the perfect can know God. But how can we know God when we are not perfect. God had a plan to solve this problem. He sent Jesus to give his perfect life to redeem our imperfect lives. Jesus took our sins to the cross and gave us his righteousness. Only through accepting this gift from Jesus can we be rightly related to God.

Reflection 3-2. Read Romans 5:1-21. The passage is difficult and has been interpreted differently over the centuries. Go over it enough times that you can summarize it in your mind. To do that, you must

1. Read and study the text carefully.
2. Reread the selection and take note of key words, phrases, and ideas.
3. Identify the main idea of the selection.

This reflection focuses on the concept of "redemption" from the perspective of Romans 5. After reading Romans 5:1-17, focus on Romans 5:18-21. (1) Write a summary of these verses, and (2) reflect on the vastness of the change between the bondage of death through Adam as opposed to the gift of life through Jesus Christ.

Shall we continue? The next phase of the journey ascertains how one responds to God.

Unit 3. Responding to God

As established above, redemption is from God. God enables it. And in some unexplainable way, God "draws" man to himself. But is there a human response to be made? Is man expected to make some move in the direction of God? Or, does God arbitrarily choose some people for spiritual life and condemn others to spiritual death?

If we can establish that every person in the world has a *right* to respond to God and each person has *the capacity* to respond to God, then we can say that man has a role in the redemptive process. God would hardly extend "the right to become children of God" ([John 1:12](#)) if man had no capacity to respond.

It is safe to say that human response is to divine invitation. Man can accept or reject God's initiative; the

decision is his. A positive response demands a personal decision, followed by action. In brief, this response can be described as "faith." Faith embraces accent, obedience, and trust. Discussion of the faith initiative is given under the headings (a) Faith and confession, (b) Repentance, and (c) Baptism. Implications of these actions for life application will be discussed later.

It is important to note here that man's action in responding to God is not for the reason of earning God's grace through deeds. On the one hand, response to God demands human action. On the other hand, this action is not to be construed as the means through which salvation is gained. The *means* is the sacrifice of Christ, not obedience to divine commands. Man cannot achieve salvation—even through keeping divine commands—for that would obligate God to man and set aside God's gift of grace.

To proceed, you must be open to the idea that the actualization of spirituality demands a proper response to God.

a. Faith and confession. Man's response commences with a hearing of God's offer of salvation and spiritual life. He is called to believe not only in God, but in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. That belief embraces the incarnation of Jesus, his ministry, his atoning death, his resurrection, and his ascension to God's right hand.

Those who resist faith in Jesus do so for a number of reasons. Some feel it is blasphemy to attribute deity to Jesus. When one understands the nature of God and his redemptive act, the fear of blasphemy disappears. Rather than take away from God's glory, acknowledging Jesus to be deity enhances his glory, for it acknowledges God's act of love with regard to human salvation. If Jesus is no more than a human spokesman for God, then salvation is left in man's ability to keep blanket commandments.

Others may resist because they cannot yet comprehend how God could come into the world in an incarnate Son. If one is waiting for full human explanation, one will remain disappointed. But if one can conceive of an intelligent source for the universe, it would not be difficult to believe God could enter the world as he pleases, even in an incarnate Son.

Man believes in his heart, which makes faith a rational act (see [Romans 10:10](#)). Those who heard Jesus speak, got a firsthand view of the Savior. The rest of us come to know him through the Gospels. The Gospels are not biographies of Jesus, but are presentations of Jesus as the Christ, the Savior, the Redeemer. Their purpose is either to bring the readers to faith ([John 20:30-31](#)) or to establish the certainty of that faith ([Luke 1:1-4](#)).

Faith is something one holds in his heart. Confession of that faith in the presence of others gives verbal witness to it and indicates one is unashamed to call Jesus Lord ([Romans 10:10](#)). A faith confessed is preliminary to salvation. In its fullest form, faith is demonstrated through loyalty to God. Confession in front of another is merely the affirmation that the person believes that Jesus is the Son of God, coupled with the decision to become a disciple of Jesus. Faith is negated through the absence of repentance, the refusal of baptism, or the void of holy living.

b. Repentance. One becomes unholy through sin, which alienates one from God. From a position of alienation, becoming holy requires one to turn in the direction of God. Holiness can only be attained and maintained through communion with God. "Repentance" is, therefore, mandated, because the unconverted person is moving in a path toward destruction. The way to righteousness and to spiritual well-being is in the opposite direction.

Repentance means, "to turn," as if to turn around. In a religious sense, repentance is associated with the idea of changing the unspiritual person into a spiritual person. It is brought about through godly sorrow. One does not have a change of heart merely because one is sorry he was caught in some anti-social act. Only when one is genuinely disturbed over a lack of spiritual attentiveness does one approach repentance. Being distressed for being self-centered and focused on evil strips away pretense and paves the way for the possibility for redemption. Worldly sorrow only brings death; godly sorrow leads to life ([2](#)

[Corinthians 7:10](#)).

Repentance is a cognitive act. The concept points to an age where the person feels convicted of sin. The age at which this is possible may vary from person to person. If the redemptive process is an individual and personal matter, then the act of repentance must be left to the individual. Forcing baptism on someone who is unaware of its role or who refuses to go through the repentance process is without purpose and benefit. Repentance stands between conviction of sin and redemption. It is neither optional nor unimportant.

The idea that repentance is an essential component of redemption does not within itself bring redemption. A secular person can have a change of heart that moves him/her in a new direction. Theologically, repentance conditions one for redemption. At this juncture, repentance is a one-time event. Yet, even after baptism, repentance becomes a constant. The Christian, although no longer enslaved to sin, does from time to time succumb to it. Certainly, he/she is covered by the blood of Christ, but reiterating dependence on God is part of the spiritual walk.

c. Baptism. Baptism marks the point of entry into the death of Jesus Christ (Romans 6). There is nothing magic in the water or even in the rite itself. Baptism follows repentance and a confession of faith. It symbolizes the death of the person to the old self, to the old sinful way. As one enters into the death of Christ through means of immersion in water, one leaves the old life and enters a new spiritual existence.

The English word "baptism" is anglicized from the Greek word *baptizō*, which means to dip or plunge, to immerse. Hence, baptism in the New Testament involved the actual submerging of a person into water.

When one is baptized, God grants him or her the gift of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](#)). The Spirit becomes a guarantee from God that he is true to his promises ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)). With the Holy Spirit living within the new Christian, the controlling influence in one's life is the Spirit of God, not sinful nature. Only those led by the Spirit are sons of God. These alone may share in the glory of Christ ([Romans 8:9-17](#)).

The Holy Spirit is not a magical power. The Spirit of God does not force the possessor to do right or keep one from doing evil. Man retains his capacity to act. The Spirit does provide strength and courage. The Spirit is an enabler, indwelling and fortifying the Christian against the forces of evil. The Spirit intercedes with the Father on behalf of the believer. Why would one not expect the author of redemption to provide assistance to the redeemed in the quest of a holy life? That is just part of the spiritual process.

Reflection 3-3. Read [Romans 6](#). **What does Romans 6:3-4 say about baptism? What does Romans 6:5-11 add?**

Action. A candidate for baptism is someone who is old enough to understand the concept of spiritual estrangement, who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who has a repentant heart, and who has confessed the sonship of Jesus publicly, *i.e.*, in the presence of others. The public confession itself is no more than a statement to the effect that "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." Perhaps the clearest context is the confession of Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, when he answered Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:15-16](#)). The confession is crucial, for in it a person acknowledges the person (Jesus Christ) in whom salvation is to be found.

For baptism, there is the need of sufficient water-be that a tub, pool, river, or ocean-to totally submerge the candidate. The act itself can be performed by any capable person. That person need not be ordained or specially commissioned by a church body to perform the act. That person should simply ask for the confession of faith and say words something like, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the remission of your sins and that you might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The act of baptism may take place at any time the candidate is ready-day or night. When that time comes, the candidate and the baptizer (plus any witnesses) approach the water. The candidate can be

pushed under the water from the top of his head, or can be lowered back first or face first. The baptizer should secure his grip on the candidate to assure the candidate can be brought out of the water in an orderly fashion. It is the significance of the event that matters. In baptism, one symbolically enters the death of Christ, whose blood cleanses sin and initiates a new life of holiness.

MODULE **4** A Spiritual Community

Christians are made individually. They answer to God as individuals. Yet, when one becomes a Christian, one is incorporated into the "body of Christ" (see [Ephesians 2:13-22](#)). One does not become a Christian and then decide whether to join a church. At baptism, divine action automatically incorporates one into the universal church (*i.e.*, assembly of called out people) for whom Christ died.

Men and women of all races and stations in life are equalized in the body of Christ. They are all spiritual children of God by way of redemption through the blood of Christ. The spiritual dimension of each person's life is lived out in the context of this community of believers, with created roles remaining intact.

While Christians belong to Christ collectively, they also function within congregations of believers at the local level. The creation of a local band of believers is hardly an option. It is mandated first by the demands of geography. These local bodies provide a cohesive unit. They glorify God by demonstrating common work, worship, and support. Spiritual interests outweigh personal ambitions. The preference of each to the other brings about a unity that binds the various members together.

When believers work together in community, they retain responsibilities within the secular world. They pay taxes, pray for their political leaders, and abide by common law. They are honest and loyal in dealings with society at large. The sacred community provides encouragement to its members, especially in times of persecution. It supplies the needs of its impoverished and protects the body from predators.

We are now ready for Stage 4 of the journey. The assumption is that once spirituality is actualized, it should be developed. Are you willing to consider the next step? It is one that depicts life in community with other believers.

Unit 1. What Is This Spiritual Community?

The spiritual community into which God has formed his people is known through a variety of expressions in the New Testament. Jesus spoke specifically about the "kingdom" of God, which implies God's reign. God is the king, with Jesus being given authority at his right side. Those born of water and the Spirit are the subjects in this spiritual realm. Other expressions picture the community as a body, a family, and a temple. Over fifty major and minor images are employed in the New Testament to show different facets of the same divine institution. The most familiar of the terms in the Gospels is that of "kingdom"; the most often used term in the Epistles is that of "church."

The church is a divine entity to which God adds people as they are baptized ([Acts 2:41](#)). On earth, the church is organized with Christ as head ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)). Each local congregation has, in due course of time, elders or shepherds. These men are themselves spiritual as the qualities laid out for them indicate ([1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:6-9](#)). These shepherds care for the spiritual flock--the Christians within the congregation ([Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5](#)). They are not overlords ([1 Peter 5:1-4](#)); they care for the

members of the community as does Christ.

The spiritual community should not be distracted by human misrepresentations that camouflage its true essence. What we see projected is often a dim image of the true reality. People who call themselves Christians or who think of themselves as spiritual are all human. Even if their commitment to God is strong, their lives will show some raw elements. Under pressure, they may become angry. Under some circumstances, they may act out of impure motives. They are not always shining examples. The true marks of a spiritual community will be its identification with the mind of Christ and conformity to his will. False advocates are recognized by their bad fruit (Matthew 7:16). Spiritual people are known by the fruit borne by the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). A spiritual community can be identified by how it puts its faith into action, not by what it claims to believe.

a. A believing and proclaiming community. Those who come to faith in Christ are bound together through symbolical participation in his crucifixion and resurrection. Together, they form the universal body of Christ. Hence, this community of faith shares common belief regarding Jesus' person and his saving power. What this body holds to be true regarding Christ's salvific gospel is shared with the world.

As a *believing* community, the church itself becomes a witness to faith in Christ. Members are distinguished by their convictions and their behavior. As people of "faith," they remain firm in the face of ridicule and persecution. They remain steadfast in times of sickness and hardship. They resist temptations, immorality, and intimidation. Its members, through acceptance of biblical revelation, hold firm confidence in God and in the lordship of Jesus Christ. In short, they entrust their lives to the Lord.

As a *proclaiming* community, the church is that divine creation set for the announcing of the acts of God. Twin objectives of the proclaimed gospel are the redemption of mankind and the glory of God. The faith, which the community holds dear, is proclaimed through words, character, and conduct of individual believers. God's glory comes as a consequence of transformed lives that reflect his being. If there is no God, there is no sense of glorification. But if God has sanctified those who are redeemed by the blood of his Son and renewed his image in them, then those sanctified manifest the character of God among unbelievers. Thus the totality of their lives becomes a living witness to the true God.

Reflection 4-1. If you were to organize a group of Christians into a "church," how would you go about insuring that the local group is distinguished as a "believing" community? How would you encourage the other members of the body to proclaim the gospel?

b. A holy and worshiping community. The concept of the church as a holy and worshiping community makes a statement about its sacred nature. It is set for holy living and for the praise of God. As a *holy* community, the church is a manifestation of God's image among men. As a *worshiping* community, the church is called to offer devotion to God and service to others.

It is important that the church be observed by the unbelieving world as a "holy" community. That is, its members live in the world, but they do not participate in evil schemes, underhanded deals, or greedy power plays. They are fair, honest, and reliable. They refrain from indulgences that reflect badly on themselves and other believers. They stay away from places of ill repute. Their conversation is pure and noble. They are not observed to be unruly or rebellious. In short, their lives reflect the holiness of God.

As a "worshiping" community, Christians declare their faith through adoration. Christians are reverent and express their praise with joy. They leave their frivolous pettiness aside and declare to the world a wholesome attitude. They pray for their political leaders and lament the conditions of evil. Their spirit is one of humility. Through ritual and in life, believers express gratitude for both physical and spiritual blessings. They are sensitive to the needs of their brethren; they joyfully feed the hungry, support the persecuted, and cloth the naked.

Reflection 4-2. If you were to organize a local body of believers, how would you go about

encouraging holiness or spirituality? Given the circumstances in your local community, where would the group assemble to worship? How would you plan the worship with respect to the Lord's Supper, singing, Scripture reading and comments, financial offerings, and prayer? What kind of atmosphere do you believe should permeate the assembly?

c. A community of compassion and encouragement. Christians who enter into a spiritual relationship with God are called to demonstrate their care for others, just as God has demonstrated his care for each of them. There is no way the church can reflect God's presence in the lives of its members without becoming a community where love reigns supreme. While the art is yet to be perfected, sincere Christians do really care about one another. They think of others before themselves. They give without expectation of being repaid. They go the extra mile, even when it is inconvenient or costly.

As an *encouraging* or inspiring community, the church functions to mature and sustain the human spirit. Stronger members of the community strengthen the weaker ones. They work as a family to make sure other members of the body have the spiritual food needed to bring them to maturity in Christ. They are welded together with love, and they enjoy each other's friendship. Being firm in doctrinal matters is important, but doctrine alone cannot substitute for a loving heart.

As a community of *compassion*, the church enables persons with deficiencies by serving their physical and spiritual needs. Compassion embraces benevolence, but it carries forward the idea of doing benevolent acts out of a heart of love and concern. The Christian community must be seen as a body of people who love and care without respect of persons. Just as God loved us while we were yet sinners, we are to love unconditionally (1 John 4:19). Compassion is not based on returning one good deed for another. Neither does it rise out of disdain or condescending pity.

Reflection 4-3. In your new congregation, how would you stimulate compassion in both heart and action? How would you create an environment that can stimulate others toward spiritual attitudes and behavior?

Unit 2. Historical Christianity

In this course, we shall be dedicated to the ideals of the New Testament. We shall proceed under the assumption that if the seed of the kingdom is sown, it will yield fruit that reflects New Testament ideals of spirituality. But it will be instructive if we touch on a few of the changes that have occurred since the 1st century. We present them here because much of what people know of Christianity comes from observing the historical church and not from Scripture. If one is seeking spirituality, and that spirituality is defined by Scripture, then one should not be misled in thinking that everything that comes under the banner of Christianity is spiritual in the true sense. *A major question before us is, Does historic Christianity produce a reliable definition of spirituality?*

A survey of church history will reveal that through the centuries new images of the church have emerged. Some of these images are due to changes made in church structure. For example, the historical church developed an elaborate system of governance, became centralized, and wielded power that rivaled the state. The idea that God's revelation was final in the apostolic writers gradually gave way to a concept of progressive revelation that placed in the hands of the clergy the right to interpret and determine doctrine. Then, there were changes that accompanied cultural adjustments. For example, when the historical church reaches into other cultures, it tends to adopt features of the religious scene that compromise the faith. Again, personalities impact the church by putting new twists on doctrinal positions. Regrettably, reinterpretation and insistence on new teachings bring divisions. In addition to distorting the New Testament portrait of the Christian community, Christians can become embroiled in internal controversy and send an inappropriate message to the world. The point is that one should be cautious about interpreting Christianity by the way claimants behave. The truth rests in biblical ideals, not in human faults.

a. The early church. During the first fifteen hundred years of the church, doctrine, worship, and structure underwent significant change. Some of the changes may be attributed to cultural preferences. Yet, others were so momentous that they seem so strangely distant from the character of the church reflected in the New Testament.

An important matter to settle in one's mind is this: Is the Bible the final authority for matters spiritual, or is revelation "progressive"? Questions surrounding the first position may be raised as to how the Bible becomes authoritative--by providing patterns, examples, suggestions, or unchanging commands? Should one accept the idea of progressive revelation, one will still have to decide the location of those new revelations--through the institutional church or through individuals? In either case, the authority of the New Testament diminishes and the standard erodes. The safest course is to conclude, as did the writers of the New Testament, that revelation is complete; further revelation is either contradictory or a duplication.

Within Catholicism, spirituality is seen primarily in sacramental symbolism, although it is also present in legends and aberrations. This is but one way in which historical theology has wrestled with bringing the mysterious into the realm of the physical world. In Islam, on the other hand, God has been excluded from the world and has become devoid of the very qualities that enable a spiritual encounter with him. Here, he remains a despot, whose will must be obeyed before grace can be bestowed.

Reflection 4-4. In what way can the gospel be perverted? Numerous passages in the New Testament point to the finality of revelation. When warning believers to beware of godless men who were preaching a corrupted gospel, Jude encouraged believers "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" ([Jude 1:3](#)). The apostle Paul declared any gospel other than that which he had received from God and preached was a perverted gospel. Read [Galatians 1:6-11](#). Often, the major challenge lies not in exegesis but in application.

b. Reformation. Although a phenomenon of the West, the Protestant Reformation set the direction for a significant part of Christianity for the last half-millennium. The reform had several strong interests. Included among these were conceptions of how the church should be organized, the doctrine of salvation, and the role of individual Christians.

Whereas Catholicism had become centrally organized from top to bottom and headed by a pope who, on special occasions, could speak with absolute authority on ideas not found in Scripture, the Protestants saw the church as a decentralized body without a common head other than Christ and informed primarily by biblical scripture. Emphasis on relics, indulgencies, and meritorious works was replaced with an emphasis on salvation by grace and faith. Protestants have not been able to agree among themselves on some matters, including the mode of baptism, church organization, and the freedom of the human will. But they do agree on faith alone as a means of salvation and on the priesthood of all believers.

The Reformation demonstrates the need for constant vigilance by all Christians. Vigilance is required because humans tend to take their faith for granted and they tend to overextend the intent of scripture. In the first instance, believers may lose the enthusiasm of their faith, grow weary under persecution, or grow indifferent. In the second instance, Christian thought may be influenced from the outside. Reaction to these influences results in change in belief and/or practice.

When judging historical Christianity, one should remember that what appears in some post-apostolic period represents a mix of human and divine elements. For the Christian faith itself, one is obliged to judge it by what the Scriptures tell us. Church history informs us about how humans interpret scripture and how they practice their faith. This will explain why there are so many different faces to Christianity. One may legitimately evaluate an historical face, but in all fairness, one should not judge the scriptural portrait by human manifestations. For something as important as spirituality, one should want to make certain that a particular Christian body can help create, mold, and nurture his/her faith.

c. Modern times. The contemporary age has elements drawn from all stages of past history. As new

trends come and go, they resemble the waves of the past. These trends should be constantly evaluated in view of the pristine ideals of the 1st century church.

During the past century, Pentecostalism had a profound impact on Christianity, especially in Africa and South America. Its effect is being seen in a sly way in mainline churches in the United States. Pentecostalism has arisen during a time when rationalistic thinking had robbed the churches of a vital spirituality. It draws people to whom the emotional element of religion holds strong appeal.

Despite the fact that recent biblical scholarship has placed a strong emphasis on understanding the Bible in its original context, the general religious populace now prefers a form of pietism. Heartfelt devotion, personal experiences, moral purity, and charitable deeds are preferred by many people who react to what they see as sacramental religion and dogmatism. A proper definition and blending of essential ingredients would be more in line with New Testament Christianity. An over-emphasis on one or the exclusion of any one of these elements (pietism, worship activity, teaching, or benevolence) will destroy the controls necessary to define and maintain true spirituality.

Examples of differences between the 1st century church and the present day are numerous and need not be detailed here. The point to be made in this section is this: Two thousand years of church history have brought significant innovations into the Christian community. One should not be content to judge Christianity on the basis of what one observes in any individual Christian or church body today. One's final appeal should be to the Bible for insight into spirituality and the manner in which a modern band of Christians should promote it.

Unit 3. Planting a Church in the Modern World

Assuming again, that the New Testament informs us of true spirituality, we should pursue God's mission for spiritually minded people. That mission includes propagating the gospel message in today's world. Taking a figure from the Gospels, the seed of the kingdom of God is sown in a variety of human hearts. What springs up and grows produces faith. Those who possess that faith comprise the kingdom of God (see [Matthew 13:1-23](#)). The local church is but a microcosm of that kingdom--the reign of God.

The term "planting a church" is a modern expression, not a biblical one. But it describes a biblical phenomenon. Jesus' commission to his disciples was, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)). Luke describes in the book of Acts how Jesus' disciples executed that commission, beginning in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, the disciples took the gospel to its environs, into Samaria, and finally throughout the world.

The book of Acts points to the divine intention that the gospel should be taken to the entire world in every generation. When the gospel is preached, people are drawn to its central figure--Jesus Christ. When one becomes a Christian, one becomes part of the body of Christ. That body is comprised of all believers throughout time. Yet, we may speak of a local body of Christians, who meet in a physical place to worship God and edify one another. *Where no such body exists, it is sometimes necessary to form a vibrant spiritual community in one's local area.*

a. Declaring the essential gospel. It may be presumptuous to speak of an "essential" gospel, when the New Testament speaks only of "the gospel." There can be only one gospel, making any deviation a corrupted message. Acts of Apostles and the New Testament epistles reveal, however, that some early Christians misunderstood the gospel and misrepresented it. Some became fascinated with minor elements and made these into major points of dispute. Others failed to observe the gospel's relationship to the Law of Moses. Still others used the gospel to create syncretistic belief systems. In reality, even minor points of contention actually resided outside the gospel itself. But to accent the essence of the gospel, we speak of those elements that distinguish it, about which there can be no compromise.

The world is filled with frivolous ideas. No less so is the religious world. This condition is a continuation of that found in the 1st century of the Christian era. The push and pull among competing ideas about what is spiritual and what is not, summon us to diligence and careful evaluation of all messages that claim to be the gospel. They cannot all be true. Even if we assume the trustworthiness of biblical scripture, we cannot trust the witness of men who easily distort it for multiple reasons. We should not casually discard the witness of scripture simply because humans misrepresent it, or we do not understand it. Scripture itself testifies to the need for serious reflection. We cannot, therefore, afford to be indifferent or unduly critical of what we read there.

Reflection 4-5. What is the goal of biblical preaching? The apostle John said, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Look at 1 Timothy 1:3-7.

b. Organizing the believers. When one becomes a believer in isolation or is known to a few other isolated believers, the proper action is to move toward the formation of a community of believers--hence, a congregation or church is born. Using the New Testament as a guide, the process is fairly simple. According to the New Testament, the act of baptism brings one into the body of Christ. The baptized person is instantly united with other baptized believers the world over, although they may not be known to them personally. But a local body of Christians provides opportunity for direct nurture, corporate worship, and ministry. It creates a circumstance where Christians can work together and demonstrate their unity and pursuit of holiness.

Finding identification with local believers is like a family reunion. These believers are part of the family of God already. The process of "forming a local congregation" is more the natural result of this reunion than the formation of a legal organization with bylaws. Permission has to be secured from no one. Christians simply begin meeting together for worship and encouragement. In time, the congregation should grow in numbers as Christians share the gospel with others. When mature spiritual men are available, they may be appointed elders or overseers to help guide the flock.

Activity, when appropriate. Review Unit 1, above. Follow an orderly process for constituting a community where faith is exercised, the gospel is proclaimed, holiness is encouraged, worship takes place, compassion is demonstrated, and the saints are encouraged.

In time, the band of Christians will ordain elders to care for the flock and deacons to assist with various activities. But this is not the first step. The first step is to find that common bond, work out details on when and where to meet for worship and encouragement. The group agrees on assignments and begins.

c. Executing the commission. The gospel is the "good news" that declares redemption from sin in Christ. Christians receive the blessing of redemption when they make a positive response to that message. The joy of this blessing motivates them to share the gospel with others. As they share with others in words and deeds, Christian witness is demonstrated through transformed lives. By uniting dissident people in the fellowship of Christ, the gospel continues its witness in flesh and blood.

Great exuberance fills the heart of the one who has found a spiritually rewarding relationship with God. The faith that brings one to Christ is a faith that is unashamed to declare to the world that Jesus is Lord, even though zeal for God may call for risks.

Early believers took to the open stage (see Acts 5:20). Some were persecuted; some were ignored; some were ridiculed. But their bold proclamation led others to believe the message and respond to its invitation. In the face of ostracism and persecution, the Christian acts out of conviction, not fear. He/she does so being confident that faith in God will bring ultimate victory.

The means by which one passes the gospel to others may differ from place to place, from individual to individual, and from circumstance to circumstance. Without fear of declaring that faith, one should not

purposefully arouse unnecessary suspicions. There are times when discretion is advised. One should not give in to the fear of terror but to the awe of the sacred. Prudence and wisdom should prevail as surely as boldness. There is no virtue in irresponsible action. One should not seek martyrdom, but if it should come, so be it to the glory of God. Perhaps where public proclamation is forbidden, one may find more private settings. When it proves difficult to initiate a conversation about Christ, one may look for opportunities to answer questions raised by others.

You have reached the end of Module 4. Proceed to Module 5.

MODULE **5** The Spiritual Life

In earlier discussion, we learned that common morality made up of innate and societal values may share much with the value system of Christianity. Yet, a significant difference rests with both the *definition* of, and the *rationale* for, the Christian value system. Since spirituality is tied to the sacred and the holy, it follows that a spiritual life has its foundation in the Sacred One, who has determined the essence of spirituality. Additionally, God's person and redemptive act provide a unique motivation for its pursuit.

The spiritual life of the Christian is a reflection of his or her faith. It takes shape out of a conscious decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is empowered by God through the Holy Spirit. It involves ethical behavior, ministry, and worship.

The Christian's life is hammered out on the anvil of daily activity. The Christian does not live outside the human box, but within it. Yet, he differs from others in how he relates to the secular world, where he must live. He holds citizenship in a particular nation, but he also holds a higher citizenship in heaven. This does not mean he becomes anti-social or anti-political; it means his first allegiance is to the Creator, not to the created.

The spiritual man does not take the law into his own hands; he subjects himself to temporal rule, for he is mandated to do so. Yet, the Christian works for the betterment of his society. He strives harder at being a better parent and provides for his family. He works harder than the average man and replaces complaint with contentment on the work site. The spiritual man has no reason to be concerned with laws concerning crimes against person or property, for the impulse that drives the natural man to criminal activity is now absent from his character. Abuse of others is against his nature. He works for good everywhere he goes. Opposition to him comes either from those who do not understand the nature of the spiritual man or from those who find the actions of the spiritual man to interfere with their corrupt lifestyle.

This module presumes that the spiritual life is not static but requires the display of a certain divinely based ethic, spiritual service in the interest of others, and worship. Do you wish to proceed with this final stage of the journey?

Unit 1. Ethics

As a category of human thought, "ethics" is a discipline that treats morals in human behavior. There is nothing within the word itself that suggests a spiritual side, although the idea of "values" appears as an associated element. Generally, to speak of ethics is to speak of moral principles and rules of conduct, without regard for the source of these rules and without judgment as to whether those rules are inherently good or bad.

Christians are called to a specific standard of attitude and conduct. Their ethical system derives from the nature of God and the call to covenant relationship with him. The ethical standard may coincide with much of what is found in the secular world, for the secular world is not devoid of influence from the spiritual realm. But the similarity is only coincidental.

"Christian ethics" is a coined phrase for defining expectant behavior. Whatever is included within the discipline is derived from scripture. But scripture itself does not treat ethics as an encyclopedic topic. We derive our conclusions from contexts that gives shape to the concept. These conclusions are drawn primarily from an assortment of biblical passages. For example, Jesus indicated that all divine revelation rides on two commandments: love of God and love of one's fellows (Matthew 22:34-40). The implications of this statement are spelled out in Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). The standard for ethical behavior is the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 3-4).

Modern secular democratic nations draft their ethical standards from the demands of their citizens. Muslim societies look to Sharia law. Communist societies reflect the economic philosophy on which their governments are built. The unit considers the application of ethics to (a) Personal life, (b) Family life, and (c) Societal life. The concern is not for rebuilding the failed system of Christendom. We shall attempt to ascertain how a believer in Christ should appropriate an ethical perspective for his/her own life.

a. Personal life. Christianity is, first of all, personal. It demands a profession of faith from each individual. It mandates an inner attitude in which a spiritual life is formed. The outward life of the Christian displays an inner holiness. The Christian is humble, empathetic toward others, meek; he or she is pure in heart, a peacemaker, and a person who does not seek revenge ([Matthew 5:3-10](#)).

Humans tend to measure right and wrong by whether an act serves the common good or whether an act is hurtful to another person. One may also rationalize that one's body is wholly under one's control and that a person is free to do with that body whatever the person desires. Revelation, on the other hand, measures right and wrong on the standard of the sacred or the holy. That means that the body itself is not a personal possession but belongs to God. The Christian's body has become the temple of God ([1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)).

Certain items are said to be the "fruit of the Spirit." These include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). This "fruit" is set against acts of sinful nature, which are contrary to the Spirit: "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like" ([Galatians 5:19-21](#)). The apostle Peter urged his readers, "Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" ([2 Peter 1:5-8](#)). Even suffering is undertaken with an elevated attitude. Presuming the suffering comes because of one's spirituality, the Christian endures it patiently ([1 Peter 3:13-22](#)). Examine your own life to see what adjustments are needed in your quest for spirituality.

b. Family life. There is no place where one will demonstrate spirituality, or the lack thereof, more directly than within the family. In public, one can put on a facade. Here, others see what one wants them to see. But the family sees one at his/her best and worse.

Intimate relationships create situations not normally seen in public life. These situations have two facets: they are unique to the family and they do not carry the same obligation for action. For example, a parent does not have to deal with the children at work, but will have to at home. Husbands and wives have very different relationships with public figures than they do with each other. As to the obligation to perform in a given manner, a person's job may require unpleasant duties. It is much easier to refuse to perform similar duties at home. Furthermore, one may feel no obligation to pretend anymore.

Ironically, one is more likely to vent anger, displeasure, and frustration toward family members than toward friends, neighbors, or the general public. Family members are generally not the cause of one's frustration and are not to blame. They are the ones who should be leaned upon for support, counsel, and encouragement. The spiritual person will not be exempt from the struggle but will operate from a different platform.

The call of the gospel summons one to live in harmony with one's nuclear family. That embraces relationships with parents and children. For the parents, it includes providing for the children. A father who will not provide for his family is worse than an unbeliever ([1 Timothy 5:8](#)).

The relationship between a spiritual husband and wife is compared with that of Christ and the church. The husband loves the wife unselfishly and the wife respects her husband unconditionally ([Ephesians 5:22-32](#); see [1 Peter 3:7](#)). Even in a relationship where the wife becomes a believer and the husband does not, the wife should act responsibly with the view of leading the husband into a spiritual pursuit ([1 Peter 3:1-6](#)).

As for the children, they are practicing spirituality when they respect their parents ([Ephesians 6:1-3](#)). A spiritual father, in return, provides guidance and direction to his children, training them in the nurture of the Lord ([Ephesians 6:4](#)).

Reflection 5-1. Compare the prevalent attitudes that pervade your own culture with those of the biblical passage, [Ephesians 5:22-6:4](#).

c. Societal life. The gospel also defines the manner in which we relate to those about us in the larger society--to employees or employers and to the government. The natural world seeks first the essentials of life. Then, it adds pleasures. The common man often finds himself in a world controlled by greed, covetousness, and powerful landlords. The spiritual man does not succumb to these pressures. He makes sure his course is steady and takes precautions that will safeguard his testimony and influence, even under duress.

The spiritual man is a "stranger" in the secular world. He is himself part of the physical universe. He must engage in work, consume food, get an education, rear a family, take time for relaxation and meditation, and find spiritual nourishment. But, in reality, he is a "stranger" to a world that is defined by fleshly appetites. Consequently, the behavior of the spiritual man will not reflect the standards of the natural man. He will not engage in the sinister behavior that he observes in those who are driven by selfishness, greed, and power. The spiritual man lives in harmony with others, is sympathetic, compassionate, and humble. He does not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing ([1 Peter 3:8-9](#)).

The apostle Peter said to those living in a spiritual relationship with God, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ" ([1 Peter 1:17-18](#)).

And again, "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" ([1 Peter 2:11-12](#)).

Unit 2. Worship

When Christians enter into covenant with God, they experience the rights and blessings that accrue from that relationship. Overcome with a sense of his majesty, believers engage in worshipful activity. They learn the language of prayer, the value of hymns, and the joy of praise. They are drawn to the sacred because they have been redeemed. They extol God, offer gratitude, demonstrate humility, and reflect God's nature in their character.

Worship is derived from a word that carries the idea of worth. It not only acknowledges a greater “power,” it recognizes intrinsic worth that resides in the Creator. Consequently, worship demands a proper object of worship and it is concerned with adoration of that One who is greater. It incorporates reverence and veneration, but reverence and veneration are focused. It is not an abstract notion.

Worship is no ordinary word. It has meaning only for the spiritual person who humbly submits to God. The measure of that submission is not keeping commands, but an imbibing of the spirit of the spiritual Father. The two great commands of the Law of Moses and the Way of Christ are the same: love God with all one's heart and one's neighbor as oneself. Spiritual worship is impossible when these are lacking.

Worship has content and form. The content has to do with the concept of God, the work of God in Christ, and redemption. The form pertains to petition, praise, thanksgiving, lamenting, teaching, and service. The Christian offers worship to God through Jesus Christ. This last item indicates that, according to the biblical scriptures, one's spiritual relationship with God is impossible except through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the instrumentality through whom redemption is possible. We shall now give attention to three topics: (a) Attitude and behavior, (b) Personal devotion, and (c) Public worship.

a. Attitude and behavior. Worship contains ritual, but worship is more than outward acts. The worshiper of God should feel a sense of the holy (see Module 2) and approach God with awe. Worship is not a frivolous exercise. Neither is it an act devoid of respect for the One who is its object. Worship demands demeanor appropriate to the occasion. The occasion of worship--thanksgiving, praise, lament, communion, etc.--will dictate the general tenor of the environment. But a contrite heart is required on all occasions.

The church has been compared to a hospital--a place for the spiritual sick. This comparison is aimed at conveying the thought that those who come to worship are still sinners--though they may be saved sinners. In a sense, that is true. No one is perfect in thought or in deed, so to rule out the sinner from the assembly would be to rule out everyone. On the other hand, the call of God is a call to holiness. We should certainly acknowledge our own sinfulness before God, but that does not mean that we are permitted to leave our sins not confessed or find solace in an evil lifestyle. However, it is unreasonable to think that the Christian approaches God as an “unredeemed” person. He celebrates his new life; his spirit is filled with joy.

Worship is conditioned on love for one's fellow humans. Jesus taught that if one approaches worship and there remembers he his neighbor had something against him, he should make peace with his brother before attempting to worship. Our own forgiveness depends on forgiving our brother (Matthew 5:21-24; 6:12-15). No one can claim to love God and hate his brother (1 John 2:9-11). Neither can one continue to act in sinful ways and expect God to be totally indifferent to our careless lifestyle (1 John 1:5-7). True worship depends on right attitude and behavior.

b. Personal devotion. Not all worship is conducted in a public venue. While public worship is often undertaken in community with others, worship can and should be a private affair as well. Private time with God is a mark of spirituality. It is a means of bringing honor to God. It is a way for one to demonstrate reliance upon God. It reveals the nature of the connection between the redeemed God. It contributes toward personal health. Personal devotion is not a command to be obeyed; it is a privilege to be enjoyed. The motivation rises out of one's own experience with the spiritual realm.

Private time with God may be spent in contemplation, fasting, reading, or prayer. These personal actions may go unnoticed by others--and they should. Jesus himself cautioned against performing alms in view of receiving praise of men. He spoke against reciting prayers on the street for the purpose of showing how religious one might be. He warned against fasting for a public show ([Matthew 6:1-18](#)).

How and when one carries out the more intimate times with the Father is a matter of personal preference. Human schedules dictate appropriate times and places for reflection. God understands we have obligations to perform, for he made us physical beings. We must eat, sleep, and work. We must care for

family. We must take time to befriend the needy. So, there should be no guilt associated with these mundane matters. They do not necessarily take away from the spiritual.

Determining a routine can be helpful, for it establishes a pattern where distractions are minimized. A routine keeps one from "forgetting" and becoming lax with spiritual pursuits. However, God has not ordained certain times of the day for prayer or fasting. Stated times work against the free exercise of devotional act, create a public display, and tend toward making the act ritualistic. Prayerfulness is an every-minute affair. Fasting is a personal choice. Each person makes personal choices regarding private time matters.

c. Public worship. There is no substitute for public worship--worship that is shared with other believers. Early believers met sometimes daily, but no less often that on each first day of the week (Sunday). Sometimes those meetings may have been specifically for prayer ([Acts 12:12](#)). But the general weekly meeting focused on engaging in a communal symbolic meal to commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ. (cf. [Acts 20:7](#)).

The atmosphere. One can only surmise what the atmosphere might have been like in the early church. Due to the nature of the gathering, worship must have been solemn. See [Acts 2:42-47](#); [4:31](#). Even today, activity among believers is to be conducted in a fitting and orderly way ([1 Corinthians 14:40](#)).

The elements. The New Testament does not contain an "order of worship." But it does provide insight into the kinds of activity that constitute public worship. A center piece in the worship of the early church was the observance of the Lord's Supper. This fellowship between Christ and his disciples was instituted prior to his death at a Passover meal ([Matthew 26:17-29](#)). Early Christians made this communion part of their worship, evidently on a weekly basis ([Acts 20:7](#)). The meal was simple, consisting of bread and fruit of the vine (wine or grape juice). The bread (probably unleavened) represents the body of Christ; the wine represents his blood (see [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)).

Singing was part of the assembly's activity whenever Christians came together to worship. The songs were probably more like chants than words set to tunes, as is more customary today. The important thing is not whether the expressions are set to the cadence of a chant or a tune; it is the word content that matters. Paul described these songs as "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." In the larger context, the spiritual man's demeanor is described as that of one "filled with the Spirit." The purpose of the singing is for mutual edification and praise to God ([Ephesians 5:18-20](#); [Colossians 3:16-17](#)). For a description of what praise-oriented worship might resemble, see [Revelation 4-5](#).

Prayer is another important element in worship. Jesus taught his disciples the manner and content of prayer with a simple model ([Matthew 6:5-15](#)). Much can be learned from the prayers of Paul, such as the one in [Colossians 1:9-14](#).

Financial offerings come under the rubric of worship--not because God needs our money, but because others are in need. Certainly, financial contributions can be used for needed housekeeping expenses. But the primary purpose for giving in the New Testament appears to have been for human relief, though Paul advocated the right of those who spent their time preaching to receive support ([1 Corinthians 9:9-12](#)). The amount of financial offering is left to the individual and God. One should give freely, according to the manner in which God has prospered him and as he determines in his own heart ([2 Corinthians 8-9](#)). The unspiritual man gives in order to receive greater benefit from his act; the spiritual man gives out of gratitude for God's love.

Since the worship assembly also provides an opportunity for people to know God more fully, some type of instruction and admonition is in order. The presentation may be either formal or informal, depending on the circumstances and the ability of a presenter.

From a New Testament perspective, worship services are communal. Any male member of the congregation can lead the service. Others participate in appropriate ways.

Unit 3. Spiritual Action

Spirituality embraces more than an inward disposition. Inner thoughts, emotions, and attitudes are certainly part of spirituality, but so are the actions that reveal the condition of the heart. Unless one deliberately conceals his/her true feelings, one's words or deeds will be consistent with what is in the heart. For example, if one is prejudiced against another, one is likely to speak or act in a preferential manner. On the other hand, if one is kindly disposed to a cause, one is likely to support it.

It would be hypocritical to think one way and act another way. The spiritual person is honest, a person of integrity. Therefore, the outward display reveals the real person. And, if the person is real, that person will implement action that is consistent with his/her convictions. However, this does not mean a person is obliged to reveal every secret of his/her heart. Some secrets are best unpublished. The injunction to confess sins one to another may not demand full disclosure of one's reservations, especially if the revelation will have only a negative outcome. Some struggles remain personal. This does not mean a person is two-faced; it only means that we remain indeed individuals who are responsible to God for our thoughts and actions.

True religion--*i.e.*, genuine spirituality--mandates service in the interest of others. The followers of Christ are motivated to serve others by the Sacred One's spiritual and physical blessings. This service will be in a manner that reflects the spirit of humility and selflessness. It includes the sharing of time and resources. It embraces a positive attitude toward the task and sensitivity toward those being served.

Serving the interests of others demonstrates in concrete form the genuine character of one's spirituality. As a matter of course, when one ceases doing good for others' benefit, one tends to become distracted by the world. He/she also tends to develop a critical attitude toward others' behavior. In the end, not only do the needs of others go unmet, but the would-be giver suffers as well. There is a balance, of course, for one cannot neglect his/her own health and responsibilities in the process.

a. Ministry to others. When we talk of service to others, we sometimes speak of ministry. From a New Testament point of view, ministry is a common and expected part of spiritual living. In that context, ministry is "service"--service in the name of Jesus Christ. Only in more recent times has "ministry" become something that clerics enter or do. In its ideal state, every Christian is a minister of Jesus Christ. The idea expresses relationship to Jesus as Lord; his disciples act as servants to others. There is no gradation in this form of ministry.

It is in ministry that the sacred and the secular meet. Jesus came to serve; his followers do the same. Jesus was persecuted for his service; his followers should expect no less. The worldly order does not comprehend this divine quality. In the world, one goes to great length to defend his personal honor; in Christ, personal honor is defined in connection with God through Christ. And that honor need not be defended by force; it is upheld by its own virtue. The motivation is pure, being derived from an association with God. It is an honor to suffer as a Christian.

The supreme example for our ministry is Jesus, who, though he was God, gave himself freely. He served in a number of ways, showing compassion to outcasts, treating people justly, healing the infirm, and teaching about God. Jesus' greatest ministry was in bringing redemption to humanity through dying on a cross for human sin. His followers find ways to demonstrate this degree of love by taking his teachings seriously and following his example.

In our quest for spirituality, we have concentrated on personal involvement with the sacred. Personal cleansing and holy living are foundational. But faith is made complete in service to others. Read and think about [Matthew 25:31-46](#) and [Philippians 2:5-11](#).

b. Where should ministry occur? Ministry occurs wherever there is need and there is opportunity. In the broad sense of the term, "ministry" is every Christian's business. Although the New Testament recognizes special ministries such as those that belong to elders and deacons, the New Testament presents the picture of a church whose members are engaged in serving the needs of others. As with all humans, not everyone responded as they should. Some gave money under pretense of having given more (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11). And some preached out of selfish ambition (Phil. 1:17). But the more spiritually minded gave unselfishly and preached faithfully.

The parable Jesus told of the Good Samaritan illustrates the principle that the believer serves the person in need, regardless of personal preoccupations and regardless of the other person's social position or ethnicity. The parable demonstrates that service in human circumstances is spirituality in action. Excuses arising out of prejudice or inopportune timing will not excuse one from this very basic expression of spirituality. Spirituality includes personal reflection and engagement in religious ritual. It also embraces doing good for others. Read [Luke 10:25-37](#).

Ministry is ongoing. Teaching others about Christ and the Scriptures, leading in worship activity, and caring for others are all part of living the spiritual life. Christians do good toward to all men, including those who do them evil. This lifts Christian ministry above those that declare good is to be done only to those who believe in God. Hence, ministry is more of a way of life than a position. Some of the most effective ministry is hidden from public view; it occurs wherever the opportunity arises.

Reflection 5-2. Provide three illustrations as to how one may think oneself spiritual, but act in an unspiritual way. The letter of James deals with Christians who think that spirituality is a matter of wishing one well and then going about one's own business. Look at [James 2:14-19](#). James illustrates the difference between a person who calls himself spiritual without action and one who actually pursues a path of spirituality.

c. How and when should ministry occur? The spiritual person is motivated by the love of God. As God has loved him, he loves his fellows. He no longer looks to selfish interests, but to the interests of others. So, starting with the right motivation, the believer looks for opportunities to serve. He neither hides his face from human need nor does he withhold assistance even from an enemy. He uses human judgment as to when and how to serve. One's inclinations, resources, training, and skill will determine the method by which one's service is executed.

Ministry may be either spontaneous or planned. Much of what one does to assist another is spontaneous. It occurs when spiritual feelings are aroused in the face of a natural disaster or crisis in the life of one's neighbor. Notice [Acts 4:32-34](#).

Some ministerial engagements may occur on a continuous schedule. These can be generated by chronic needs stemming from a crisis. Or, one may execute a purposed plan of service through leading others in their spiritual walk through teaching or counseling. Ministry is best organized when it involves a large number of people or when it is sustained over a period of time.

In no case should Christian service degenerate into rote activity. Neither should it be approached as an obligation, act of drudgery, or out of resentment. The spiritual person acts because it is the right thing to do and because he/she is a servant of the King.

As far as the church as a whole is concerned, some ministerial acts are designated. Some roles, like those of elders and deacons, require qualities fitting the positions. Interestingly, one of the qualities related to elders is that they serve not out of compulsion, but willingly. They are not to become "lords" over the flock, but servants (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Conclusion

As far as this course is concerned, except for a couple of submissions, we have now reached the conclusion of our journey. Perhaps many questions remain about what we saw or did not see along the way. That is as it should be, for the pursuit of spirituality is like any excursion. You would not miss an opportunity to rehearse your experience with others. Yet, your personal excitement may not be shared by your audience. The journey has such impact on your life that it may be life changing. Your hearers may be listening only artificially, waiting for that pause that allows them an opening to counter with a description of their own experience. Rest assured, nothing can rob you of your personal experience and you cannot transfer your experience to others.

There may be areas of disagreement or uncertainty. That is okay. No two people ever see everything alike. For that reason, we continue to respect the views of others and search together for the full life that God holds for us. The objective is not full agreement with other humans, but full agreement with God. We can help each other along the journey, but in the end, each must make the journey.

The spiritual quest is a lifelong process. Just as human curiosity can never be satisfied, satisfaction with self can never be attained in fleshly existence. But that is the nature of things as God has constituted them. So, what are our options? We cannot go back to yesterday. What is done is done. And tomorrow never arrives. We only have the present moment. What we do in the present moment is our only option. What is done in real time is what counts. If we shall allow our relationship with God to grow stale, we will be the loser. So, let us live to the fullest each moment of our lives. Therein will come great contentment and lasting enjoyment.

If there is any service we may render, please call on us. We are always ready to assist with any spiritual need, for we are fellow-travelers who are anxious to assist one another as we walk in the path that leads to life eternal.

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