

SOUL DEPOSIT

**::LEARNING TO INVEST IN YOUR
SPIRITUAL LIFE::**

For any person who is called to work for the Kingdom of God in this life.

(So, Christian, that's you.)

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THIS RESOURCE

is intended to do several things:

- Explore the spiritual life of Jesus while He lived and ministered on earth
- Compile various wise practices of Christians who have run the race well
- Encourage you as you minister daily to those in your community
- Equip you with practical ideas for the care of your soul and its renewal in Christ Jesus

USE IT IN WHATEVER WAY SEEMS BEST TO YOU:

- As a spiritual stockpile of armor, which when properly applied, will avert the fiery arrows of the enemy.
- As a spiritual pantry, full of food, which when ingested will feed your soul and energize your ministry.
- As a spiritual check, which when deposited in your bank will yield a positive balance and offer overdraft protection.

At the risk of making something spiritual into something transactional, we must acknowledge our need to be replenished. As people who live and work with other people, we can quickly become thirsty, hungry and tired in our souls. We all work with folks and situations that threaten to suck the very marrow from our bones.

All too often, we allow the demands of ministry to pull us away from the One by whom we are called to minister. That was never His intention.

Let this resource be a means for re-connecting to the Living Water, the True Vine, the Bread of Life. Only Christ can satisfy our busy, weary souls.

**Note: I've read all the arguments and I still choose to refer to God in the masculine, as Father. If that offends you, feel free to make mental notations. Don't let it trip you up. God is Spirit, after all.*

WITHDRAW TO DEPOSIT ... TO WITHDRAW.

As ministers of the Good News, we need to follow the example of Jesus in all matters.

We have all read and heard about the times when Jesus went off by Himself – often, Scripture says, “to a lonely place,” – for prayer and preparation.

For people engaged in 21st century life and ministry, though, this sounds like an unachievable dream. We wonder who has the time for that. We wonder if it’s even possible for us. We wonder if it’s really necessary.

Let’s look at the uncomfortable truth:

- We *all* have the time for that.
- It *is* possible for you to retreat.
- It is a positively *crucial* part of ministry today.

Read those truths again, my friend. Over and over until you are convinced.

When you do as Jesus did and regularly withdraw to a quiet place that lacks distraction, you will find that your obedience is paying off. You will have something to give.

A prideful person has trouble finding time to spend in solitude with God; this person insists that he’s got everything under control, that she’s fine and can manage all right. In reality, our enemy loves to hear these words – they provide yet another fracture in the sacred relationship between Creator and creation.

Plainly put, if you are notorious for “running on empty,” you are in trouble. Let’s take a moment to acknowledge our frailty before God:

Lord, You introduced Yourself to Moses as “I AM.” Sometimes I get the idea that I AM, too. Please forgive the outrageous pride I display when I seek to be and to do everything all the time. Only You are all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving, all-capable, all-wise. Help me to understand my place in relation to You. Help me to understand that while I have infinite worth in Your eyes, I am but a breath, a shadow, a flower that blooms and withers. Teach me true humility, Lord, as I seek to become more like Jesus in the time You’ve given to me. Through Christ, amen.

DO-BE-DO-BE-DO...

I used to think that Jesus went to quiet places to pray merely as an example to us. That because Jesus was fully God, He didn't really *need* to pray like He did, but He wanted to set a good precedent for us to follow.

Now I'm convinced that *because* Jesus was also fully human, prayer was the most important thing He did while on earth. Without a strong connection to His Father, Jesus might've wavered in His purpose. Staying firmly missional was only possible by staying firmly connected. Indeed, the most strenuous prayer time in Jesus' human life happened hours before He was scheduled to fulfill His ultimate mission to earth.

If it were me in that situation, I fear that last day would've looked like this:

- Last 24 hours on earth. Oh my. So much to do. Make a list.
- Double-check upper room reservation – confirm with caterer.
- Find candles and cushions in storage, air out cushions and polish candlesticks.
- Freshen towels on medium heat with a dryer sheet, fill foot-washing basin.
- Uncork the wine to let it breathe, maintain proper temperature.
- Look over Vine & Branches sermon again, add finishing touches.
- Prepare for Q&A time with the guys; they aren't going to get this.
- Pack prosciutto, tomatoes and feta for Mount of Olives snack break.
- Call attorney and review legal defense again, coach the guys on their testimonies.
- Bottle up pain-killer/sedative mixture for when the guys abandon me and I go to the cross.

Dark humor aside, we are people consumed with *doing*. There were a lot of things Jesus could have done in preparation for His departure, but He chose to do the BEST thing: He spent time with the Father. He prepared His soul for the mission at hand (John 17).

Yes, as we minister, there are things we need to do.

But let us not become so consumed with doing that we forget to be.

If we are only doers and mere productivity becomes our passion, we risk burying the part of us that makes us human. Take the time, make the time, find the time, designate the time to allow for communion with God to be your first priority.

(Please understand that prayer is most certainly productive – we're distinguishing here between working from a place of pride & exhaustion and working from a place of submission & empowerment.)

WHEW, THAT WAS WORDY.

But now that we've talked through some of the higher-level-thinking stuff, we can look at some ways to make that all happen. From here on out, there will be a lot of bullet points. Go ahead: print a copy and put it in a binder for future reference.

What follows is an assortment of ideas for your spiritual enrichment. Don't be fooled by the simplicity of some of these – at times “simple” is precisely what we need. Jesus was awfully fond of using simple things to plant great truth in people.

Nothing here is a “magical” device – there is no promise here of a “divine formula” for communion with God. But these exercises, done with a glad and sincere heart, will hopefully serve to strengthen your faith and renew your spirit for the journey ahead. Do them alone, with your family or with a trusted friend in Christ. Up to you.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.” -1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

UNDERSTAND:

- There is nothing new under the sun. Not all of these will be earth-shattering revelations to you. When borrowing a specific idea, credit is given. Otherwise, it's just a universally helpful thing to do.
- Some things will take minutes, others hours, others a few days. Maybe you need to slip away for an entire week of renewal, or maybe you only have a few moments to put on some armor. Do what you need to do.
- Some activities are deep, some are simple – all are meant to point to Christ.
- These exercises will *only* point toward Christ. Simply doing an activity will not necessarily renew you. Evaluate yourself and be led by the Spirit.
- As leaders and ministers, you ought to share these gleanings with others as you seek to make disciples.
- You may find it helpful to make some notes about your discoveries; and what a precious gift to leave for posterity – a list of spiritual practices and how God used them to teach and renew!
- This resource is far from complete – it's a springboard into spiritual renewal.

GIVE THANKS. (If anything deserves to be first on the list, it's this.)

- Expect a **miracle**. Before the bread and fish were multiplied, Jesus gave thanks for the miracle about to happen. Before Lazarus was summoned from the tomb, Jesus gave thanks for the miracle about to happen. Before any spiritual renewal occurs in your life, give thanks for the miracle about to happen!
- Know your **place**. When we express gratitude to God, we acknowledge Him as our Provider and Sustainer. Apart from God, we can do no good thing. Giving thanks affirms our position in relation to our Father.
- Get **perspective**. Giving thanks puts a quick end to whining and why-me-ing. Yes, life is hard. And yes, God is good. View the former through the lens of the latter.
- **Post** your thanks. A standard post-it note pad has 100 sticky little pages. Fill up a pad with things you appreciate and flip through it every now and then. Remind yourself to be actively grateful.
- Just **stop**. When you find yourself in a frustrating, grievous or otherwise impossible situation, stop. Give thanks. Even if the only thing you can muster is gratitude that the situation isn't somehow worse, you're on your way.
- Get a **hot pink** pencil or pen. Keep it with your Bible, and when you come across something in Scripture for which you're thankful, underline it in hot pink – it will stand out like a bright thread of joy.
- Start a **journal**. A whole book, just for thanksgiving. A collection of simple, dated entries, each beginning with "Thank You, Lord..." will remind you of God's faithfulness for years to come.
- Take a **posture** of humility – try giving thanks on your knees before God. It changes your perspective entirely to realize that His grace alone is responsible for your gifts.
- Make it a point to thank the **people** who help you through life – we cannot take people for granted. You might even thank someone who challenges you – what an event that would be!
- Thank God for the "**little things**" – those daily blessings that are really quite important. Clean, running water. A car that starts. A place to call home.
- Gratefulness is a big factor in **attitude**. Like the old song asks: Are you humbly grateful or grumbly hateful? Evaluate and make some changes.

READ A BOOK.

- Read a **biography**. Choose an historical Christian and find out how he or she heard from God, worked for God, struggled with faith, triumphed in faith. Whose story fascinates you? Is it John Newton, the slave-trader-turned-pastor? Is it Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian who shared her faith in a Nazi camp? Maybe it's Augustine or Spurgeon or Chuck Colson. Read about C.S. Lewis or Elisabeth Elliot, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or Joni Eareckson Tada. Be inspired by the lives of others.
- Read a **science** book. You can often find textbooks at thrift stores – marvel at the uniqueness of what God has created. Science is, after all, the study of God's handiwork. (I picked up a microbiology text for two bucks and it is blowing my mind.) You don't have to fully understand it to appreciate that God made it and understands it!
- Read a **problem-specific** book. No matter what is getting in the way of you living fully for Christ – be it anger, addiction, fear, unbelief, bitterness, gossip, guilt, lies, pride, jealousy, laziness, loneliness, lust, poverty, stubbornness, worry or self-righteousness – there is a book out there, written by a Christian that expounds upon Scripture. Get it, read it, be honest and apply it.
- Read a **hymn-stories** book. If you're singing them, leading them even, you should learn what inspired them. There are a ton of great books that tell about how hymns of faith came to be – reading one will help the ancient words to take on fresh meaning.
- Read a **leadership** book. There are so many good ones out there. For an added challenge, read a secular book on leadership. Compare and contrast what it says with the way Jesus led. Turn it into a Bible study of sorts.
- Read a **creative** book. What inventive pursuit gets you going? Is it music, cooking, sculpting, design, sewing, construction, landscaping? Read a book about it and let those God-given creative juices flow. Maybe your spiritual renewal will come through a creative project that has little to do with "church." Or maybe your new project will inject new life into the church. Remember, the very first thing the Bible tells us about God is that He created...
- Read a **difficult** book. When a friend gifted me a copy of My Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis, I dismissed it due its original language being 15th century Latin. The English translation I received is a little easier to understand,

GET OUT.

Remember that the word “renewal” contains the word “new.” Go and see **something new** – something that stirs you – something about which you can wonder. Wherever you go, get out with the intention of spiritual renewal.

- Take a **hike**. Whatever the season, spend time admiring the creative work of God in nature. Make the proper preparations and allow ample time for stops, both planned and spontaneous. Maybe you know of a woodland waterfall and you plan to stop there for lunch and devotions. Maybe a surprise visit from a deer will give you pause mid-stride to worship the Creator.
- Take an **indoor hike**. If weather or physical limitations are quashing the hike idea, set aside time to explore the world through photography. Visit websites like nature.org or simply do an image search for “sunrise,” “wheat field,” or “night sky.” Take out a coffee table book and soak in the beauty. Let the glory of creation inspire you to adore the One who made it.
- Visit a **city**. It’s tempting to think that God is only the God of the natural world, when He is in fact the God of all nations and cities, too. Visit a downtown area that isn’t part of your routine and roam the streets to see what you can see (remember, it’s not a shopping trip!). Smile and say hello to other folks and eat lunch near a window. Pray for the city as you explore.
- Visit your **property**. Often, we do one of two things when it comes to the land on which our dwelling rests: either we come and go and don’t notice it, or we spend time working it, changing it and fussing over it. As a spiritual discipline, spend some time in your yard/on your land with an eye for wonder. Be an observer of the amazing things God has allowed to appear in your midst. Check out bugs, leaves, rocks, twigs, animals and even a handful of dirt. See what kind of conversation happens with your Father.
- Go on a **quest**. Do something you seldom do and ask God to teach you something about Himself and the people you’re called to love. Spend a day riding public transportation. Sit in a bar with a Sprite and observe. Walk through the mall just listening. If you’re really brave, dress down and visit a soup kitchen for a meal; make some friends. Do it with the right spirit and you will grow.
- **Travel** a great distance. If you’re able, see another country or a different part of this one. Expand your idea of people and you will gain a greater perspective

DON'T MOVE. (Be still and know that He is God.)

For some of us, every day is go-go-go-go-go until our bodies literally “crash” into bed at night. Carve out time to practice the power of stillness before God. How can we hope to hear from Him if we never calm down and listen? Strike a pose (sitting, standing, kneeling) and try one of these while you remain motionless.

- **Sing.** Close your eyes and wait for a song of worship to enter your mind. Sing it to the Lord. If you forget the words, hum it. Let it be the most important thing that’s happening right now. Make it an offering.
- **Stare.** People think I’m nuts when I say that sometimes I just sit and stare at the wall for a while. Before you tsk, give it a try. (Eastern meditation says to empty your mind; Christian meditation says to fill your mind with Christ.)
- **Imagine.** Read a story in Scripture, like the one about Peter in Acts 12. Then, close your eyes and imagine being in the story. Which character are you? What do you see, hear, smell, feel? What are you thinking? Immerse yourself in the portion of Scripture.
- **Rest.** Sometimes you just need a nap. Often, the method by which we fall asleep affects the quality of the sleep. Prepare a place to nap, wear comfortable clothes, set up a way to awaken, then settle in and close your eyes. As you drift off, whisper words of worship to God. Or, read a verse of Scripture and repeat it over and over until you are asleep (Psalm 4:8 says “I will lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”).
- **Intercede.** If you live in a neighborhood, put a chair out front or stand and look around. Remain still, but pray for everyone you can see. Pray for each person in each car that passes, and for each person in each house you can see. Be silent for a time in between each one. Is God calling you to do something for a neighbor? If you have no close neighbors, do this at the mall or in a café.

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE.

What is hiding in your heart? Is it God's Word? Maybe you learned memory verses as a kid – are they a bit dusty in your mind? Commit to the discipline of memorization. This is a powerful thing that God uses to remind us of His promises and wisdom throughout the day.

- Sketch out a **plan**. You know yourself – how is this going to work best for you? One verse a week? Or a paragraph for the month? What tools will you need? Will you choose verses randomly, topically or some other way? Devise a plan for the year and stick to it. Ask God to give you a hunger for His Word and to help you in your efforts.
- **Feature** these verses prominently. If you're on your phone or tablet a lot, find an image with the verse and set it as your screen background. If index cards work better for you, carefully write the verse on a card and stick it to your kitchen window or dashboard. Maybe you have a dry-erase board or a chalkboard at home – write the verse on there. Laminate the verse and stick it up in your shower. Whatever works!
- **Take it** with you. Maybe you find yourself with a lot of down-time due to waiting on doctors, mechanics, what-have-you. Get a stack of index cards that has a metal ring binding them together. Stash them in your pocket, purse or glove compartment and put that time to better use.
- Use the **Internet**. Many wonderful Christian people have taken the time to post ideas and lists that will help you get started on the right track. Search within Pinterest and go from there.
- Consider an **app**. Search for “Bible memorization” and see if any apps look like they'll work for you. Two that look good are *Scripture Typer* and *Verses – Bible Memory*.
- Use **music**. If you are used to creating music, set each verse to its own tune. The rest of us can look up guys like: Steve Green, Dan Becker, Bob Kauflin, Sovereign Grace Music and Seeds Family Worship.
- Understand the **context**. Before you start to memorize a verse, read it in context so you know what it's talking about. Handle the Word properly.
- Use your **senses**. Write it, look at it, speak it, discuss it with others, draw it; when possible, associate smells, flavors and sounds with the verse.

PRAY.

Prayer is one of the most powerful opportunities we have at any given time. So why do we treat it as an obligation and a task? Worse still, why do we give up on prayer the moment it seems not to “work”? Prayer is obvious, it’s a mystery, it’s daily and yet divine. Here are some creative ways to encourage dialogue with Almighty God.

- Have a **specific place** where you can go to pray – a place you can be alone and undisturbed. Maybe that’s the early-morning breakfast table, a nook or corner, even your vehicle. Lots of saints turn the water closet into a prayer closet. ☺
- Hang a length of string on the wall like a **clothesline**; write prayer requests on colorful pieces of paper and pin to the line.
- Put a **world map** on your wall and pray for the nations. Add flags to areas where persecution is strong; add pins to places where you have friends.
- Mosey through **town**, praying for those you see and for the work that happens in each building. Stop at the fire station, post office, police station, library, city hall, nursing home, etc. and pray. Ask your local school or hospital if you can walk the halls, praying. If not, travel the outside perimeter.
- Pray for your **church family** – not just for physical needs, but for emotional, financial, relational and psychological needs, too. Pray for barren couples, pray for lonely widows, pray for young families and old families and struggling families and for all those who do ministry. Lay every burden at the cross.
- Remember to keep prayer requests in **confidence**, if you were asked to do so.
- Get a box of **popsicle sticks** and two containers. Label one container “Active” and the other “Answered.” Write requests on the sticks and pray for them until God answers in some way. Then move them to the other container.
- Pray with a **mirror**. Read Psalm 139 and thank God for making you you. Ask Him to help you see yourself as He does. Ask Him to clarify His call on your life and to give His continued guidance as you live each day.
- Make a **prayer board** – hang a bulletin board and use color-coded paper squares. Mark and store each one when it’s answered.
- Remember the **ACTS** – adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.
- Face your **fears** – make a list of your fears, then pray through each one, asking the Lord for courage and power to overcome. 2 Timothy 1:7

- Hold a **smooth stone** or a wad of play-dough in your hand while you pray – knead it and use it to help keep you focused.
- **Write** your prayers – if a journal intimidates you, get a stack of index cards instead. If you want, color-code them based on their nature. The point of recording your prayers is to see and remember how God has moved.
- **Doodle** your prayers – get some colorful pens and fill a piece of paper with your prayer. Not sure how to start? Draw a circle in the middle and write praise inside. Turn it into a sun or a flower or an abstract page of bubbles!
- Walk through **your home** and view it as an allegory of your life. Examine your innermost, room by room. Stand in the kitchen and check your attitude toward service/hospitality. In the family room, examine your family relationships. In the office/den, look at finances, study, work. The bedroom is for intimate relationships, the closet represents secrets only God knows about you, the living room is your public persona. Let God into each “room” with you and ask Him what He wants to do in there. (from *abidaheartsonfire.com*)
- Give God your **dreams**. Tell Him your hopes and desires – then entrust them to His keeping. If you want, commit them to paper and keep them in a jar.
- Many times in Scripture, prayer is accompanied by **fasting**. It’s a foreign concept today, unless you’re getting blood work done. Get back to a biblical understanding of fasting and prayer – let your rumbly tummy remind you to pray. Stay hydrated!
- If you are able, take a trip to a **desert**. A journey through an arid landscape will have a beauty all its own. Water and light will take on new meaning. See how your prayers change in a new wilderness surrounding. Visit a monastery and pray with desert brothers (they still exist). Read Luke 4:1-13.
- Pray the **Lord’s Prayer** (Matthew 6:9-13) slowly, adding to it as you go. Say it in your own words. It was meant to be a model, not a chant.
- Pray the **Scriptures**. It is God’s Word – use His words in your conversation with Him. It will remind you of His promises and will bolster your faith as you approach the throne. Find a psalm that captures your current situation; pray it as though you wrote it.
- Read a solid **book** on prayer. It should be our lifelong pursuit to gain greater understanding and effectiveness in the area of prayer. Start with the chapter on prayer in Richard Foster’s [Celebration of Discipline](#).

PURGE.

Have you ever tried to find something that you know for certain may or may not be somewhere in a cluttered mess? Right. All too often we are consumed by our consumerism – we overwhelm ourselves with stuff. Spend some time evaluating your home, office, vehicle, storage. If you're very brave, look at your schedule. Which areas need some work?

- **Understand** that God is a proponent of order. He moves everything from chaos to order. Sin brought chaos into the world; when we work toward an ordered existence, we work toward God's ideal. Because we are made in God's image, we operate better when we live in clean, structured environments.
- **Start somewhere.** Look at your spaces with the eye of an outsider - which space needs the most attention? Where should you begin in order to maximize the benefit to your spirit? For instance, if your study area is so cluttered that you're avoiding it and thus avoiding time in God's Word, start there. Or, if it's springtime and your porch is so overrun that you won't enjoy sitting out there, that's where you should begin.
- **First, dream.** Stand or sit and imagine the way you'd like the room or area to look. How *should* it be organized? What is the ideal design for that space? What setup would be the most effective, the most streamlined, the most beautiful? What colors and shapes would you like to see there?
- **Ask questions.** What is the purpose of this room/area? Why do I have this? What needs to go? Are these things that can be passed along, sold or donated? Are there items that need to be recycled or thrown out? What needs to stay? Are they things I use every day or only sometimes? How can I better store occasional items so that I have a less-cluttered space? How can I use what I already have to change the look and feel of the room? Do the things I have encourage my ministry and walk with Christ or do they hinder me? Does anything need to be repaired, repainted, refurbished or reimagined?
- **Gather ideas.** Search online or in magazines to see what an uncluttered room can look like, but be realistic, too. Ask a friend or colleague to help you. Make a list of goals for this project – what do you want to be able to do with this space that is difficult right now? How can you maximize the room's potential?
- **Act.** Put your ideas into practice. Set up a few empty boxes or trash bags and sort out-going items by destination. "This box is for books to donate to the

prison, this bag is for paper that needs to be shredded.” Have a friend help you go through things sensibly. Have lunch delivered and get right back to it. As you see progress, you will feel a burden lifting! You will wonder how you ever got so much stuff. You will find things you forgot you had, and will delight at the idea of enjoying them again.

- **Give thanks.** Remember, this is a spiritual discipline. It marks a return to simplicity. Thank God for your progress and for the weight that has been lifted. Ask Him to guide you toward a simpler life.
- **Follow through.** Once most of the clutter is eliminated, you can finish up the room with a thorough cleaning. Homemade cleansers are less toxic and far less expensive. You can paint, rearrange, and otherwise transform the space. Plant items with intention; avoid haphazard placement.
- **Enjoy!** It takes a lot of hard work to purge, but the benefits are undeniable. Blessings can quickly turn into burdens. Unburden yourself (and your family) and see how good an uncluttered life can be.
- **Maintain.** Don’t let all your hard work come undone – keep your renewed space clean and tidy by remembering these rules:
 - Before you bring anything in the door, know its purpose and its place.
 - Put things back where they belong when you’re finished.
 - Clean as you go – when you see a mess, take care of it.
 - Beware of flat surfaces – work to keep tabletops free of junk.
 - Remind yourself how good you feel when things are well-kept.
- If you’re still not convinced to purge, listen to these words from Richard J. Foster, author of Celebration of Discipline: “Simplicity is freedom. Duplicity is bondage. Simplicity brings joy and balance. Duplicity brings anxiety and fear.” Keep what is useful and rid yourself of the rest.

WHAT are you thinking about the “Purge” section?

HAVE A CONVERSATION.

Often our minds and hearts are renewed by sharing with other Christians – hearing their stories and gleaning godly wisdom from their experience. Invite a Spirit-filled friend out for coffee with intention – here are some conversation starters. (Some of them will serve you better if you share your answer first...)

- “What has God been teaching you lately?”
- “Do you see anything in my life that needs to change?”
- “What books have you been reading?”
- “What passage of Scripture has been running through your mind?”
- “Explain to me your understanding of prayer.”
- “How should I be praying for you?”
- “What one word would you use to describe the season of life you’re in?”
- “How do you experience success in (a specific area of) life?”
- “What metaphor best describes your spiritual journey?”
- “What issue most grabs at your heart and ignites your passion?”
- “What is your biggest stumbling block to intimacy with God?”
- “Tell me about a time when a big disappointment turned into a big blessing.”
- “If you could have a breakthrough or miracle, what would that look like?”
- “If you had a whole week, free of obligation, what would you do?”
- “Which historical Christian would you most like to meet?”
- “If you were given a ridiculous fortune, what would you do first?”
- “What has been your experience with the Holy Spirit?”
- “Describe the change you want to happen in your church.”
- “In what way do you offer your best worship?”

WHAT ELSE comes to mind?

SERVE.

This may seem counter-intuitive to this body of ideas, so let me distinguish. Serving others should be something that enhances your God-given joy. In ministry, service often becomes an obligation. Too many times you've thought, "Yeah, but if I don't do it, nobody will." That kind of service is mandated by your position or a board's decision – but I encourage you to find something to do willingly and cheerfully as unto the Lord.

- First, **evaluate** your gifts, skills, interests – it's easiest to serve when you can convert a talent you enjoy into a way to help others. If you like to sew, for example, consider sewing little dresses and shorts to send to children in developing countries. If you love to hunt, but end up with too much meat, talk to some widows and single parents and fill their freezers. If cooking gets you fired up, use your energy at a community kitchen or help with funeral meals.
- Get some like-minded **friends** and serve together. You don't have to create another "organization," just join forces and meet some needs.
- Go **online** and look for ideas – you don't have to do something unique, but you might want to. Search for "online volunteer opportunities" or use specific keywords. You can collect bras to fight human slavery, you can tutor kids from home, you can help the Humane Society through their Faith Outreach Program.
- Look around your **community**. Can you play the piano at the hospice unit? Can you read to a head-start class? Can you help out at Meals-on-Wheels or another sort of feeding program? Can you get groceries for someone? Can you go with a widow to help her buy a car? Can you tutor or make some flashcards for a kid who's behind? Can you mow your neighbor's lawn? Can you help a teacher at a local school? Can you make and donate something for a charity auction? Again, this is not meant to get you in charge of one more thing – the idea is to lift your spirit with meaningful service.
- There's an **app** for that – type "volunteer" into your mobile app store search box. There are a handful of apps that will get you hooked up with people in need. One, called Be My Eyes, allows sighted people to connect with visually-impaired people to help them with simple tasks through live video chat.

CREATE.

I've heard people say they haven't a "creative bone" in their body. Nonsense! The first thing we learn about God in Scripture is that He is creative. Not long after we see that we are made in His image. Because God is creative, you are creative. Don't let some disillusioned person from your past discourage you from realizing your creative potential today. Making new things can make you feel new, too!

- **Define "creative."** *Resulting from originality of thought, expression, etc.; imaginative.* That's you – now make it happen!
- **Get a post-it note and write a poem.** Just a small one. Try a haiku (3 lines) or a cinquain (5 lines). Not all poems rhyme. Try expressing some prayers as poems; that's basically what the psalms are. Open your Bible to a random place, read a section and write a poem in response. Sum up your week's experiences in a poem. Nobody else has to read it – but now you have created something new! Do this every day to exercise your brain...
 - Haiku – The goal is to paint a word picture using only 17 syllables. Line 1 has 5 syllables, Line 2 has 7 syllables, Line 3 has 5 syllables.

 - Cinquain – Line 1 has 2 syllables: one word giving the title, a noun.
Line 2 has 4 syllables: two adjectives that describe the title.
Line 3 has 6 syllables: three words that express action and end with –ing.
Line 4 has 8 syllables: four words that add feeling or description.
Line 5 has 2 syllables: one word that is synonymous with the title.
- **Dust off your camera.** Or use your smart phone and take quick creative breaks when you see something interesting. Give yourself some artful parameters – visit the same spot at different times of day, or across several seasons. Try some expressive shots of your spouse or child(ren). Capture the lines you see in the architecture around town, or the structure of a spider web at first light. Take a series of photos based on Proverbs. Print and frame some of your work and showcase it at home or give it as gifts.
- **Re-imagine something.** Remodel a room or refinish a piece of furniture. Reupholster something. Get a can of spray paint or some fabric dye and recolor something. Rearrange a room. Re-engineer a shirt. Remake old jeans into a rug, a wreath, a pot-holder or a shoulder bag. Replace your closet doors

with curtains. Reorganize your storage areas. Rejuvenate your church's Sunday School program. Re-examine everything!

- **Change up your menu.** Are you someone who always cooks or bakes the same old standards, week after week and year after year? You only live once – try some new recipes and flavors! Purchase a spice or herb you've never used before and look up recipes that feature it. Get creative with a familiar recipe and substitute some things. Most recipes came into being because someone was creative – not afraid to try a new thing.
- **Create for the Kingdom.** Come up with a board game to teach theology. Or a card game to get families talking. Design a worship center or banner for the sanctuary. Incorporate fresh ideas into sermons and lessons. Make inspiring bookmarks for your coworkers. Find an unmet need in your community and draft a creative, workable solution. Craft encouraging cards and send them to folks. Develop cost-effective home repairs for people who can't pay you. There is so much we can do that goes beyond what we're doing!
- **Go for it.** Sit for a moment and close your eyes. If you could try ANY creative pursuit with the guarantee that you would be good at it, what would that be? Now, give it a shot. Take a ceramics class, get a canvas and watch Bob Ross reruns, talk with a landscaper in the spring. Or just start. One lady I know decided to create side tables with thrift store glassware and epoxy. Another friend decided to write songs, so he learned to play the guitar. So maybe it isn't your thing – but maybe it is – at least you'll know!
What's stopping you?

I AM _____, AND I'M CREATIVE.

HERE'S WHAT THREE PASTORS HAD TO SAY: from the Church of the Brethren in Western Pennsylvania.

- **Music inspires me.** Most often when I am "seeking God's face" it is a song that directs me there. I may go to the piano and play some beloved old hymn or a newer contemporary song and meditate on the words as I play. I may hum or sing aloud a song that's been on my mind and heart. I may play a CD or listen to KLove. Music calms me, helps me to focus and push away troubling or anxious thoughts. Songs from the soul are my spiritual practice to draw closer to the Lord.
-Ruby Mader, Rummel
- **I spend time away from everyone** in fishing or hunting, often in conversation and planning with God. Sometimes quietly and other times in outspoken conversation and sometimes in disagreement over points. This is my soul seasoning, and I love those moments!
-Pete Kaltenbaugh, Meyersdale
- **What has worked for me personally** is reading my Bible every single day and starting my day with prayer. I read the Bible in a year and start over. This I have passed on to my congregation. It may sound simple but I believe our church people are not reading their Bibles every day and are not praying every day. The discipline folders from David Young do help. Practicing the disciplines is also important. Another aspect is our relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ. We (at County Line COB) have been trying to draw closer to others. We take five minutes during worship to walk all over the sanctuary to greet each other. That freedom to walk around and chat a little has impressed visitors. Draws us all closer. I think the pastor must lead the people to have a positive attitude and not negativity. Encouragement for others. We have all joined together to share ideas to grow and witness. We must have a sharing of ideas. Recently I did a webinar and read an article on what the younger generation wants from the church. They found young people want real Christians and simple worship. So I think we need to renew and be who we say we are. The last thing I found important is *constant* renewal. Always looking for growth and seeing what works.
-Barry Conn, County Line

