Title

# Chapter 1 Intentional Spirituality

*“He who possesses the divine powers of the soul is a great being, be his place what it may. You may clothe him with rags, may immure him in a dungeon, may chain him to slavish tasks; but he is still great. You may shut him out of your houses, but God opens to him heavenly mansions.”* - WILLIAM E. CHANNING, Thoughts

## Controlled by your emotions

The lost soul roams the earth waiting for the end to come. Enduring pains that only this life can bring. Their only hope lies is the relief that comes with death. I have seen it. I have witnessed the torments of people who have experienced pain and disappointment.

1. Unable to love and unwilling to forgive. A life void of joy and desperate for change. I was on the verge of becoming a lost soul myself until I decided enough was enough. I needed to become stronger emotionally and mentally. Every negative circumstance, every harsh word caused me to fret and worry. I was completely controlled by my emotions.
2. Then I stumbled upon powerful spiritual practices that changed my way of thinking and helped me grow stronger.
3. Habits like reading, working out, reflection and journaling. These helped me become aware of my weaknesses and my shortcomings. I began the painful process of shoring up the areas of my life that were tearing me apart. Day by day I grew stronger and healthier. I eventually regained control of my emotions and took back my life. In short, I began to take responsibility and extreme ownership for my life. I began to see life through the viewpoint of God and not through the lens of my situation.
4. Spiritual formation or intentional spirituality is the process of getting you to see that God views you as sacred.

## The word sacred mean to be set aside as something special.

1. You are sacred because you are special to God and you are set aside for Him. He allowed His son to die a horrible death to save you from an eternity of suffering and loss. God sees something in you that you do not yet see. Does that make it any less true because you can’t recognize it? Of course not. You are set a part for God as special whether you know it or not.

## Constructing an Inner Sanctuary

In this book, I will lay out for you how I view and practice spirituality. This is by no means the perfect or only example. This is merely one option. I am giving you an inside look into my personal habits and traditions.

1. I tend to see things clearer when they are straightforward and practical. So, I will endeavor to write a clear and simple explanation and practice of the disciplines of spirituality.
2. Like many things in life, they are not complicated. They are not easy, but the concept is simple.
3. To be successful, you will need to take my suggestions and surround them with a healthy dose of passion, strategy, and dedication. The good news is that spiritual health is at your fingertips. You can have it if you want. But it will not fall out of the sky like a heavenly miracle. If you want to move forward in spirituality, you can, but you will have to earn it. You can do it. I believe in you and God believes in you.
4. That’s why the first Key to Spiritual Growth for most people is to take control of their lives on a spiritual level and on a very practical level. In the first century AD, [Saint Benedict felt the same desire](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=26). He was living in the bustling city of Rome, going to school at the age of 19 or 20. Yet, he felt the draw to leave behind the wild life of his pagan school companions and to deeply embrace the more meaningful life offered by Jesus. Benedict left Rome to seek shelter from the distractions. Eventually this desire of his heart led him to found a religious order and build a monastery. Saint Benedict’s monastery became a place of sanctuary sought out by many people who felt the same desire to shut out the world for a time in order to recenter themselves on Jesus.
5. Yet, Saint Benedict’s famous rule and “[Spiritual Exercises](http://www.fromtheabbey.net/spiritual-exercises-of-saint-ignatius/)” talked more about the importance of establishing a sanctuary within your own mind and heart.

## Beginning steps to building an inner sanctuary

1. Plan: Many people develop a detailed plan for their life. But most do not give any thought to planning and building their spiritual life.
2. Tear down: Your body and soul is the land that you build on. Bad habits and actions have been built in your life over time. You must tear down the bad in order to build something new.
3. Spend time: Every day spend time in your new building as you build it. When I was in Junior High my father began to build a room that was off to the side of the house. He built the floor and the roof and it had a skeleton of walls. I talked him into letting me sleep out in that room over the summer as he built it. When it rained I could smell, hear it and feel it. I will never forget that summer as I watched my room being built.

## The pain of Growth

1. Let the following quote be the mantra for your personal discipleship journey. *“The pain of life is better than the comfort of laziness.”* - Terry Scott Bonner. I wrote this phrase one morning waking up to pain from an ankle injury that I suffered the night before in soccer. My regularly scheduled game was cancelled so I posted on Facebook that I was looking to play soccer if there was an opening. My friend, Nathan, replied and asked me to play for his team. During the game, I injured my left ankle. It was painful but I finished the game and hobbled home. The next morning, I woke up to pain and an immediate feeling of excitement. I was excited that I was feeling the pain of living life and going after something. A phrase popped into my mind, “The pain of life is better than the comfort of laziness.” I posted the incident on Social Media and someone responded with, “Well, you should have stayed home, you wouldn’t have gotten injured.”
2. Funny how people spend more time and energy looking for an excuse to not put in the effort. If you go looking for an excuse not to do something you will find it. There is a temporary comfort in not pursuing God through discipleship. You will not have to face the glaring weaknesses of your life. You will not have to cope with making the hard decisions required for transformation. It will seem easier to do nothing. But there is joy that can be found in the pain of transformation.
3. I have always found that things that require hard effort are usually the same things that result in something beneficial in my life. So, yes you will feel it when you are being stretched and molded by spiritual transformation. And I guarantee you that in the end it will be well worth it.
4. Richard of Chichester (13th Century English Bishop) said, “Day by day, three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly and to follow thee more nearly.” I love this quote. The journey is a daily effort to be more like Christ. I know what you are thinking, “Did he just use the word effort to describe our spiritual journey?” Yes, I did. I know we are more comfortable with words like peace and tranquility. But the word effort better describes the power behind my journey towards peace. It takes hard work and discipline to achieve peace in our lives. It is an earned reward if you will.
5. The reason most people are not successful at attaining a reasonable level of spiritual growth is they mistakenly equate peace with rest. Is it peaceful when your mind is controlled by stressful worry? No, it is not!
6. We must learn to come into alignment with the ways and thoughts of God by renewing our mind and restoring our soul all of which takes effort. We must realize that there is more to Christianity than Sunday Morning service and church politics. There is a deeper level on intimacy and understanding that can only be attained in the digging process of discipleship in the secret place of prayer. Finding spirituality in community is important but it can never replace the depths of authenticity that you will find in seeking God for yourself.

## The Journey of spiritual development

Tim and John were on a boat in the ocean. Tim says, "This fishing spot is amazing how are we going to mark the spot so we can come back here tomorrow." John replies, "I know! Let's mark an X on the bottom of the boat. That way tomorrow we will know exactly where this place is." Of course, that’s foolishness. The ship is always moving and is never in the same spot. It would never take them back to the place they wanted to be.

1. The boat is always moving it’s not a fixed landmark. It’s not a fixed point. Many people are living the same way.
2. They are marking an X on things in their lives that are important to them. Their marriage, job, children, and finances. They consider it a fixed point to navigate their life by. But what happens when the marriage falls apart, a child dies, or your dream job is lost. The X is erased, and the once fixed life is now adrift on the sea of the unknown.
3. You must navigate your life by the fixed point of God.
4. And that can only be known by practicing the spiritual disciplines.

## Spiritual development is a journey

We must look at discipleship as a journey. It is true that there will be inner peace and contentment at the end of the trip.

1. But it's important for you to understand that the process of spiritual growth is just as important as the result.
2. You can have a level of joy and grace in your daily life as you walk out this incredible journey today. In fact, I would say that it is necessary for you to find peace and contentment daily as you embark on this voyage of change. If you don't, you will become disgruntled and frustrated. You will be tempted to give up on the journey altogether. God created this process for you to find immediate relief from your suffering and for you to see measurable changes in your life. So, don't live in hopelessness. Start the journey of transformation today and enjoy the benefits of being a Christian right now. Today is your day to have a strong inner life. The spiritual disciplines that we teach you in this book are tools for your growth not an end unto themselves.
3. If you practice them daily you will find the peace and inner strength you desire.

## Caretaker of your soul

1. The Old Writers used to say, “We are minders of the Light.” How true. We are minders and caretakers of the light of God that was instilled in us when become followers of God.
2. As Richard J Foster puts it, “We are plagued by the dogma of the Mediator.” Which means we as humans are always looking for someone else to speak to God on our behalf. It may be in the form of a priest, pastor, friend or counselor. We have learned that it is safer for others to speak to God for us. It may be safer and easier, but it will not help us develop as Christians and as humans.
3. Caretaking of the soul is an art that must be learned and mastered. The Bible says in Exodus 33:11 AMP, “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.”
4. Relationship with God is the ultimate goal, and spiritual formation is the process of attaining that relationship. God is always calling us to intimacy with Him. His still small voice is always resonating in our ears if we are quiet enough to hear it. It is easy to become hardened due to circumstances or difficult people that we encounter. But God does not want you walking through life as some robotic Christian void of feelings. Numb to everyone and everything. He wants you to live life with a full heart and an adventurous spirit.
5. *“It is the soul that makes a man, but it is also a man that makes the soul.”*

- Terry Scott Bonner

## Spirit, Soul and Body

1. Did you know that you are made up of spirit, soul, and body?
2. The amazing part is that you control two out of the three. God influences the spirit but we are the managers of our soul and body. We believe in the body because we can feel it. Just pinch your arm or cut your finger and you have definite proof that the flesh is real and significant. But you are so much more than this decaying earthly form that you live in.
3. Many people embrace spirituality in the hopes that God will take total control of their lives. And that everything will magically work out. Their mind will be renewed, their discipleship will be complete and they will live in perfect harmony with God.
4. But just knowing spirituality will never cause you to be healthy and at peace in this life. Only by PRACTICING spirituality will you enjoy the benefits of peace, health, and happiness. Here is the truth. It is in the care taking of your soul and body that you become what God intended you to be.

## Mismanaging our souls

God’s intention was for man to develop the capacity of his soul through daily intimacy and spiritual development.

1. Unfortunately, life is filled with circumstances outside of our control. Combine that with bad decisions making and you have a recipe for disaster.
2. Many people have limited their capacity to enjoy life and connect with God due to poor soul management.
3. In short, their diseased soul becomes the filter through which they view life. And the way they see life dictates their thoughts and actions.
4. We will always feel a sense of displacement in this world if we are out of alignment with God due mismanaging our spiritual life.

There are three areas of spirituality that must be maintained

1) Mental: renewing the mind.

2) Spiritual: restoring the soul.

3) Physical: strengthening the body

## What is the soul?

1. The depth and width of the human soul are beyond understanding.
2. It is limitless in capacity. It is the true gauge of spirituality and the unseen controller of the human mind. It is by far the X factor in determining emotional and mental health. It is the filter through which we not only see life but also how we interact with others. But what is it really?
3. The soul is defined as the spirit and essence of a person. Your soul is the part of you that makes you who you are, and the part that will live on after you die. The soul is central to you being human.
4. As George MacDonald said, “You don’t have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body. The soul is the totality of your mind, emotions choices, and character.” Our body may be the one thing that we see most often, but the soul is truly the essence and nature of who we are.
5. It is our anchor that holds us tight when we are going through tough times. It is our compass through life and without constant maintenance we will go off course.
6. Some would say I thought God was our compass. No God is like the stars in Heaven. A Fixed navigation point. Our soul is like the instrument that sailors use to chart their way according to the stars. If the instrument is bad the course is wrong. The stars remain fixed and intact. Same with our soul. If it is not maintained, then it becomes corrupt and damaged. Our course in life will thereby by corrupted even though God remains unchanged and a fixed point.
7. By not maintaining our soul we are not maintaining our destiny in life. It is no wonder people get off course and lose hope.
8. DANIEL DEFOE said, “The soul is placed in the body like a rough diamond; and must be polished, or the lustre of it will never appear.” How true. People only see our soul through our actions and speech. Our treatment of others speaks louder than our religious lectures.
9. 3 John 1:2 NLT, "I'm praying that all is well with you and that your body is healthy as I know your soul is." This scripture tells us that the soul can be measured. He is saying, "I see that your soul is healthy." Our flesh is always decaying and at some point, will stop functioning. We can maintain our flesh in a sense by eating healthy and working out. To some degree, we are slowing down the process of decay, and we are improving our quality of life.
10. The soul does not decay. At least not in the human understanding of the word. It is more like a computer. It is used for a purpose. That purpose should always be orientating you towards God. If you're not maintaining your soul, it will naturally begin to shift and guide you towards the flesh. It is not decaying; it is just changing its purpose.

## Your Number One Ministry

1. Your primary goal in life is your own spiritual development.
2. Everything you do or say filters through your level of spiritual formation.
3. You reproduce who you are not who you want to be. So, while we are eager to get into the ministry or get a promotion we are not always ready for that level of influence.
4. I remember a quote from a Steven Segal movie. The hero asks the question, “What does it take to change the essence of a man.” The answer was time. It takes time to change. Many people are not willing to take the time for their soul to come into alignment with God through discipleship.
5. It is fear that holds us back. We are afraid that if we do not strike out and take our destiny in our own hands that we will somehow miss out.
6. You can't miss your destiny by waiting on God for the right timing. You can mess it up by moving too fast or by being too slow and missing the open door. Being ahead of God or behind him are both wrong. There is a Kairos (Perfect timing) moment for each of us, and we need to be prepared to act when it arrives.
7. I would submit to you that the journey is the destiny. That who we become is way bigger than what we ever accomplish. It is easy to view ministry as a way of impacting others. But when we view our ministry as changing ourselves then will begin to see an immediate change in our lives. And other people will see it as well.
8. People are impacted by who we are not what we say. Recently I preached at a local church. The sound man approached me and with tears in his eyes said, “You know why I like you. Because your heart and mind are clearly in Heaven when you preach but your feet are firmly planted on the ground.” What he meant was that I motivate people to be more spiritual but I do it in a way that allows their spirituality to affect their real lives. Christianity is useless if it doesn’t help us here on the earth.

## Always becoming something

1. We live in a constant process of change. And it is in direct proportion to what we do, what we listen to, what we read, and who we hang out with. In other words, what we fill ourselves with is what we become.
2. What you listen to is what you become because you are more focused on that topic and more likely to act upon it. Naturally, when I listen to leadership podcast, I think more about leadership, and I become better at it. When I listen to financial teachings, I become better at my finances because I am focusing on them more. What do you listen to?
3. Some say, “I only listen to worship.” Great. That’s sound good and sounds very spiritual. You are becoming better at worship, but how is that helping your broken marriage? How is that helping your finances? How is that helping your relationships? That kind of thinking takes us back to the false premise that by just feeling spiritual all my issues will be taken care of. It won’t happen.
4. True change is more than hoping for miracle. It is earned by applying what we learn. The Bible says to work out salvation daily, to renew your mind and to kill the old nature. That takes effort my friend. Don’t get me wrong. I encourage the practice of listening to worship daily. It has a profound affect upon my spirit and emotions when I do. I am simply saying that you must much more balanced in your approach to transformation. And that includes applying discipline to every area of your life.
5. Ultimately, you determine what you will become. Spiritual formation gives you the tools to become better and healthier. We are continually being formed, and that is why the Bible describes us as clay in the master's hand.
6. The question is who will be your master? Who or what is forming you? We are all disciples of something or someone. Be careful what you listen to, read and watch because that is exactly what you will become. One rule of thumb should be, “Is this action forming me into the person I want to be." If not, don't do it.

## Ongoing Orientation towards God

1. The spiritual habits and disiplines we teach help orientate you toward God daily. They help you to position yourself to connect and receive from God.
2. There are so many thing in our lives that have their own gravitational pull. That without effort and strategy on our part we will be drawn to them.
3. The Bible says to work out our salvation daily. Doesn’t just mean repenting. It means stopping to create a God awareness in your life.
4. **Illustration:** My friend James comes home every day and turns on worship videos in the living room. Everyone kinds of migrates to watch the beautiful scens and hear the music. We are positioning ourselves to connect with God.

## What is your motivation?

1. Guilt is not a good motivator for spiritual transformation. At times, it has helped. Like the time a friend of mine patted my stomach and said, “Letting yourself go eh.”” I didn’t get mad; I got motivated. I worked out until I was in shape and my stomach was hard. Yes, my motivation might have been somewhat selfish and prideful, but eventually, my motives turned positive. I was getting into shape to be healthier and live longer. So, I can be a good example to my kids.
2. A good motivation for spiritual growth will always take you farther than a bad one. Are you are trying to become more spiritual so you can be at a higher level than others? Are you hoping to become known for your gifting and knowledge of spirituality? If so, those are not good motives. It defeats the primary purpose of spiritual grown which is an intimate relationship with God. If you are always focused on others, you will never truly find the heartbeat of God in transforming you.
3. Desperation is a great motivator for change. When we are desperate to look better physically we will get in shape. When we are desperate to see our marriage change we will change it. When the desire to change becomes higher than the pain of living our existing life we will finally do something about it. When I needed to change my life, desperation was probably the only force compelling enough to make me willing to listen.
4. If we do not like the chaos of our current life then refer to a quote from Ruth Haley when she says, “what was lurking deep in the subterranean levels of the soul: What was motivating the frenetic quality of my life and schedule?” *“Your life and your choices are determined by what motivates you the most.”*

- Terry Scott Bonner

## Sin Management vs Soul Development

1. What is your main focus?
2. We have a conflict with our sin nature that cannot be won by ourselves.
3. (Galatians 5:17 NLT7) “The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.
4. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”
5. (Romans 7:15, 18-19) “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do…. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.”
6. Sin management is deceiving. It makes you think that you are good with God.
7. Sin management eventually leads to you managing other people’s sin because you realize that you can’t control your own.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How can you protect the sacred in your life?
2. Starting right now, what would be step one for creating a strategy for your life?
3. How can you lay down your problems before God so he can bring peace into your life?
4. How can you learn to become more of a proactive strategist rather than a reactive emotional person?