

A SMALL GROUP GUIDE FOR

**LOOKING
INWARD,
LIVING
OUTWARD**

THE SPIRITUAL
PRACTICE OF SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this companion study guide for my book *Looking Inward, Living Outward: The Spiritual Practice of Social Transformation*. My hope is that this guide will help you and your group work through the practices in the book and facilitate your journey of social transformation. In this guide, you will find reflection questions to direct your work as well as general principles to orient you toward the material in the book. May your spiritual path be full of discovery as you encounter the living God who works with us for a better world.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND OVERALL ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

As you enter into your time with this book, consider the following quote.

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”

—G.K. CHESTERTON, *WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD*

Why are spiritual practices, the practice of the religion of Jesus, “simple but not easy”? This is the challenge put before us. To live the life Jesus prescribes for us is hard because it goes against all our worldly training. The spiritual tradition has always recognized that the solutions to our problems as human beings are already known, but they are not deployed on a large scale because they require the concentrated effort of people in community. So the good news is that we have been given the answers; the bad news is they are hard to practice.

The book is organized into four sets of three practices. These are arranged like concentric circles, and the practices radiate out into the world. I think it is helpful to consider this organization as you work through each practice. Here are the four sets:

Preparing the Ground

Willful Attention
Boundary Creation
Fearless Humility

Growing Relationships

Self-awareness
Powerful Presence
Compassionate Relationship

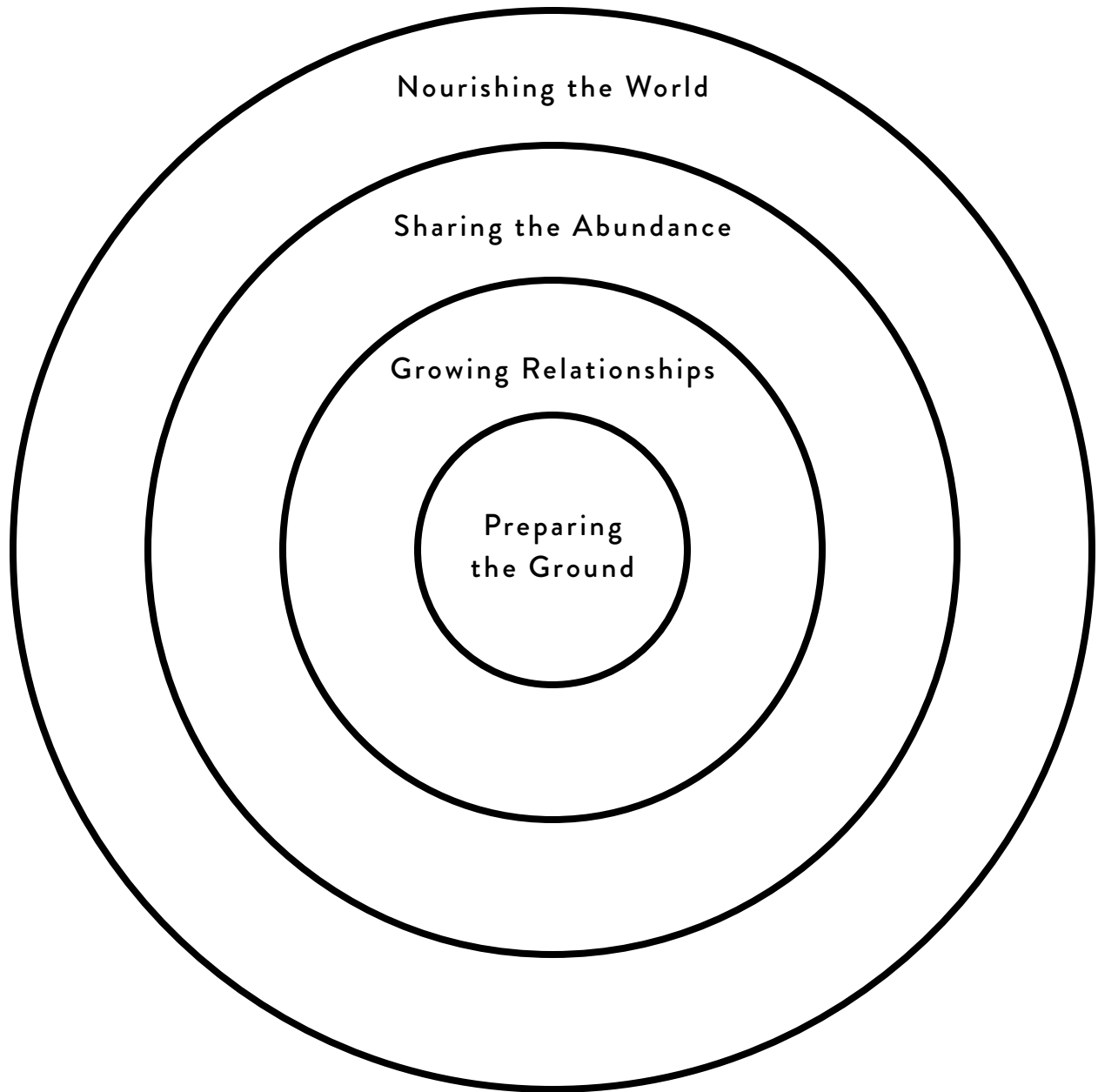
Sharing the Abundance

Serving God
Radical Trust
Letting Go

Nourishing the World

Discernment
Loving Your Enemy
Prayer

THE FOUR CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF PRACTICE



REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR EVERY CHAPTER

As you and your group begin to work through the book, consider these questions for every chapter.

What stood out for you in this chapter?

How were you challenged in this chapter?

What is your take-away from this chapter?

What is one action that will arise from the practice in this chapter?

What can you do individually? What can you do as a group?

PRACTICE-SPECIFIC GUIDES

The following are guides for each practice. This list is by no means exhaustive. As you work through the book and these guide questions/reflections, I encourage you to come up with your own questions and activities as you practice.

These can be done as individuals or in groups. (For a group, the “you” or “your” in the question can refer to your group or community.)

Willful Attention

1. Take a deep breath, feeling the air move in and out of your body.
2. Consider your deep connection to the Divine.
3. Pick one concrete actions that helps you put God at the center of your life. What does this look like for you? Notice how it feels to consider this action.

Boundary Creation

1. Consider the people and situations that consume your time and energy.
2. Which of these give you life and which drain you?
3. As you notice these patterns consider how you will align your boundaries according to a life-giving Spirit.

Fearless Humility

1. What images and ideas come to mind when you hear the word “humility”?
2. As you consider being both fearless and humble, what do you notice in your mind and body?
3. “Standing in solidarity” is a phrase that conveys this sense of fearless humility. How are you called to stand in solidarity in your community.

Self-awareness

1. Think about a regular action or activity in which you engage. Consider why you do it. What is the root cause of this action?
2. What do you want? Think about this question in large and small situations. What’s it like for you to ask this question?
3. How does focusing on self-awareness feel?

Powerful Presence

1. When you hear the term “spiritual space” what comes to mind?
2. How can you cultivate spaciousness in your life?
3. What does it feel like to be present and not fix things? How can you practice being with suffering even when you cannot make it go away?

Compassionate Relationship

1. Notice how you communicate with others about plans, ideas, opinions, desires. Do you say what you mean?
2. Consider the list of neuro-atypical behaviors on page 91. How do you feel as you read this list? Which of these might you try adopting?
3. Pick one or two activities that will make your relationships both more authentic and more compassionate.

Serving God

1. Discuss what it means to be a “servant.” How does this word make you feel?
2. Consider and discuss your relationship with money.
3. Pick one way that you community can begin sharing resources among yourselves.

Radical Trust

1. Our society teaches us to be self-sufficient; this is one of the great sources of our anxiety. Name your community of care and support. Notice whether you have such a community.
2. If you do not have a community of care, consider how you might begin to build one.
3. If you do have such a community, consider whether you share your material needs in that community. What would it be like to begin to support one another’s material needs?

Letting Go

1. Imagine letting go of all your earthly possessions. What comes up for you as you consider this?
2. Imagine being part of a community that shares everything. Discuss what you notice.
3. What would your response be if God suddenly decided to charge humans for use of the earth? Discuss what you learn from considering this question.

Discernment

1. What is your definition of “justice”? Do a Bible search for this word. What do you learn?
2. Discuss “spiritual indifference.” How is this a challenging idea?
3. Notice life-giving and death-dealing fruits in your life. What changes would you like to make in response to these observations?

Loving Your Enemy

1. Name an “enemy” of yours. Think about this person as a human being who was once just a baby.
2. Can you feel compassion and love for this tiny baby?
3. What would it be like to experience everyone on the planet as a human being just like you?

Prayer

1. Name a few actions that you can do to affect the world in a prayerful way.
2. How has this study changed your understanding of prayer?
3. Express appreciation for your group and this work together.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This Small Group Guide is for use with the book *Looking Inward, Living Outward: The Spiritual Practice of Social Transformation*, available here: UpperRoom.org/LILO

To contact Daniel Wolpert about his book or invitations to speak or teach, email him at micahprays@gmail.com.

