



LARRY WARNER

**DISCOVERING THE**  
**SPIRITUAL**  
**EXERCISES**  
**OF SAINT IGNATIUS**

## **The Bible Reading Fellowship**

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# INTRODUCTION

This book, an adaptation of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, was written to help you to enter into a holistic, life-transforming journey towards Christlikeness. This is not another book about the methods or techniques of Christian formation but a vehicle that enables you to come before God through the gospel narratives in order to meet Jesus again for the first time. If you have grown weary of hearing and reading about spiritual formation and are ready to dive heartfirst into a spiritual formation experience, this book may be the right book for you. In fact, near the end of this introduction, you will find a list of statements under the heading 'Is this book for you?' that will help you determine just that.

If you are continuing to read through this introduction, then you are feeling a pull towards, or at least an interest in, the journey set down in the pages of this book. *Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* is not for spectators but for those with a hunger for something deeper, a yearning to walk with Jesus (not just read about Jesus), a desire to embrace more of what God has for them, a longing to be equipped to partner with what God is doing in and through them, and a willingness to be brutally honest with God, Jesus and yourself. These desires will serve you well as you embark on the adventure of faith contained within these pages. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let us continue with the introduction.

## My experience with the Spiritual Exercises

This book is an outgrowth of two worlds colliding: my 21st-century world of Protestant Christianity and a set of writings from the Counter-Reformation period of the 16th century: the Spiritual



Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. The catalyst for this collision of worlds were the words of Dallas Willard in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*. While reading it, I ran across a sentence that momentarily caught my attention and was then forgotten. Yet, unbeknown to me, that sentence would be used by God to fuel my exploration of the 16th-century writings that form the foundation and essence for what will be found, entered into and experienced in the pages of this book. Willard suggested that the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius would be a good template for creating a curriculum for Christlikeness.

If you... make necessary adjustments to the content... you will see [the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius] offer in substance... a curriculum, a course for training, for life on the rock. And that is why, century after century, they have exercised incredible power over all who open themselves up to them as disciples of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Though at the time I had no idea what the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius were, these words of Willard would be used by God to open me up to the richness and value contained in these writings of Ignatius at the appropriate time.

It turned out that the ‘appropriate time’ came about five years later, when I felt God’s prompting to pursue training in the art of spiritual direction. I hesitantly moved forward and eventually enrolled in a training course at a Catholic university. As I began the course, I discovered that the Exercises would serve as the foundation for my training. It was at this point that my Protestant world and the 16th-century writings of Ignatius began to collide.

Over the next two years, as I worked my way through the Exercises, I began to fall in love with the various types of prayer that comprise them. The prayer styles enabled me to come before God with a new openness and honesty, to be with God and to hear from God in ways I never had before. I was also delighted by the emphasis on the person of Jesus. He was presented in the Exercises not as a

subject to be studied, but as a person to dialogue with, learn from and walk alongside. I began to see and experience first-hand what Willard had alluded to in his book regarding the use of the Exercises as a curriculum for Christlikeness. As I spent time with Jesus in the Exercises, my spirit was enlivened and my heart transformed. The wisdom and insight contained in them, as well as the holistic emphasis on body, mind and spirit, made so much sense to me.

In the years following the spiritual direction course, I began introducing people to the Exercises and experimenting with many of the prayer styles incorporated throughout them. I watched and observed how the Exercises helped people to reconnect with Jesus and with themselves in life-giving ways. After a couple of years of doing this, I was asked to co-author a book entitled *Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry*, which was drawn from material found in the Exercises.

When a professor and administrator of an evangelical theological college asked me, 'If you could teach anything you wanted to in the area of spiritual formation, what would you like to teach?', I heard myself saying, 'I would love to lead an interactive class based on the Exercises, because I have come to appreciate them as a powerful tool for spiritual formation.' Now, as they say, 'the rest is history'. Over the next few years, I led deans, professors, administrative staff and students through the Exercises and, again, saw lives touched and transformed by God using them.

The material that comprises much of this book flows out of my experience in leading people through the Exercises at that college.

## About the Exercises

For nearly 500 years, the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius have been a tool for spiritual formation into Christlikeness. During those years, their popularity has ebbed and flowed, but they are now

experiencing a revival of sorts within both Protestant and Catholic circles. I believe this is due, in large part, to the renewed emphasis on spiritual formation, as well as the desire many Christians have to experience the person of Jesus in meaningful ways, thus making the Exercises the perfect choice.

My attraction to the Exercises flows from the fact that they were not written by a theologian or scholar but by Ignatius long before he received any formal religious education. These writings are an outpouring from Ignatius' own conversion and subsequent experience of walking with God (see Biography, pages 296–300). Ignatius took notes on what happened as he walked with God, on what he read and on what others taught him along the way, and he eventually compiled all that into a manual of sorts that became known as the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola.

The Exercises were crafted by Ignatius to help people, all people, to encounter Jesus. So strong was his passion for giving the Exercises to others, so they might know Jesus, that he willingly went to jail on a number of occasions for leading people through them. The emphasis of the Exercises is growth and development into internal conformity to Christ, freedom in Christ and greater intimacy and union with God. These Exercises are built on a twofold foundation of scripture and Jesus, with the vast majority of the material being drawn from the gospels. The trajectory of the Exercises follows Jesus' life – birth, early ministry, passion and resurrection – using the relevant biblical narratives to guide retreatants through the life of Christ.

More and more Protestants are discovering the treasure chest of spiritual formation tools contained in these ancient writings, once the sole property of Catholics, and are beginning to make use of them as never before. Rather than seeking to make use of these tools independently from the Exercises, this book keeps the tools firmly situated within the intended structure of the Exercises. This will enable you to get a sense of their original intention and use as you journey through them, and will also familiarise you with them so you

can wisely continue to make use of them once you have completed your time in the Exercises.

The sections of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola used in this book are paraphrases based on the literal translation of the Spanish autograph by Father Elder Mullan (1909) and the translation of David Fleming, both of which were published in Fleming's *Draw Me into Your Friendship*<sup>2</sup> and the translation of George Ganss found in his book, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*.<sup>3</sup> For the most part, the text of the Exercises is not quoted here in this book, but functional equivalents have been chosen. References in the notes referring to these paraphrases and quotes are from Fleming's book.

## Adaptability

Jesus had radically changed Ignatius' life, and he wanted others to have the opportunity to experience that change for themselves. Thus Ignatius designed the Exercises so they would be accessible to all people who desired to walk more closely with Jesus, no matter what their station or vocation in life.

Traditionally, when people speak of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius, they are referring to a format of a 30-day experience in which a retreatant would remove himself from his ordinary responsibilities and withdraw to a retreat centre or monastery. During this time, the retreatant would spend five one-hour periods in prayer each day, beginning at midnight. He would also meet daily with a spiritual director.

But this was not the only method Ignatius made available to those desiring to journey through the Exercises. He was well aware that the 30-day method would make it nearly impossible for many to take advantage of this remarkable means of spiritual formation, so he provided two other methods for people to journey through the Exercises. One of these is known as the '19th Annotation', which allows those involved in 'public affairs or pressing occupations'

to journey through the Exercises. This type of experience in the Exercises is also referred to as 'the Spiritual Exercises made in everyday life'. It is this form of the Exercises that is found in this book.

I want to assure you that this book is not a watered-down version of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. Its form is in harmony with Ignatius' original intention, and there is ample evidence that he made use of this mode of giving the Exercises to others. Although it is seemingly less intense and demanding than the 30-day retreat, do not think that using the 19th Annotation is easy or is used by God in less significant or transforming ways.

I have journeyed with a few people who had experienced the 30-day retreat and then went through the nine-month journey as well. As I spoke with them, there were aspects of the 19th Annotation journey that were far more difficult in their own way than some aspects of the 30-day retreat. These individuals also commented on the value of journeying through the Exercises in the midst of life and how that experience naturally led to their making many of the practices an ongoing part of the rhythm of their life long after the Exercises were over. The question of how to take the practices back into the 'real' world was not one they had to deal with in the abstract, but rather one that was lived out naturally each and every day.

Although this book has sought to retain the spirit of the Exercises, it also differs from the original Exercises in a number of ways. First, the fact that you – the one who may soon be journeying through the Exercises – are holding this book containing them is a major deviation from tradition. Traditionally, the only person in possession of the Exercises was the person who was journeying with you through them as your spiritual director. This is because the written Exercises were really a manual to be used to guide someone else. The director would speak about the part of the Exercises you needed to know, but you would not be given the manual.

The Exercises were not to be journeyed through alone, and this is the danger inherent in producing a book like this. As with the original version, this adaptation is not to be journeyed through without the help of a spiritual director. A spiritual director plays an extremely important role in helping you to get the most out of the Exercises, while also assisting you so you do not fall into the snares that are common to many who take this journey, including Ignatius. So, when the time comes for you to enter into the Exercises, I strongly urge you to seek out a director who will make this journey with you. If I could make it a criminal offence to go through the Exercises without a spiritual director, I would.

Another difference in this adaptation is the inclusion of some quotes, optional exercises and prayers to bring greater variety to your time in the Exercises and to create a little extra space and freedom for you from time to time. Also added are questions that follow the scripture passages for each day and were not part of the original Exercises. These are provided to help you explore and interact with the text. All these additions to the Exercises are a result of my journey through them with others and are provided to enhance your experience in them.

Finally, in the body of the Exercises is a voice in the form of text boxes sprinkled throughout. This voice serves as a guide. These were not part of the original Exercises but were added as I discovered some of the difficulties that those going through the Exercises often have. They are provided to help you deal with these common struggles. They are not there to replace the need for a spiritual director but to augment the director's role.

These adaptations to the Exercises as found in this book have sought to keep intact the essence and genesis of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius while also providing ongoing guidance and direction as you journey through them. These additional pieces are in harmony with the spirit with which Ignatius penned the original Exercises.

## Benefits of the Exercises

### Walking with Jesus

It was my desire to walk with Jesus that helped me to engage fully in the Exercises and journey through them. This has also been true for those with whom I have journeyed through the Exercises. They each have had a deep yearning to walk with Jesus, to know and experience Jesus in an interactive and personal way. That is exactly what the Exercises help to facilitate.

The goal of the prayer practices found in the Exercises is not to learn more about Jesus but rather to walk personally with Jesus, meet Jesus and interact with Jesus. The daily prayer practices and the use of the gospel narratives are intended to engender encounter with Jesus so that you will begin to know Jesus more clearly, love Jesus more dearly and follow Jesus more nearly. In fact, to know Jesus more clearly, love Jesus more dearly and follow Jesus more nearly is the stated purpose of Week 2 of the Exercises. The sections that follow Week 2 continue the journey with Jesus, walking with Jesus to the cross (Week 3) and journeying with the resurrected Christ (Week 4). The thrust of the Exercises is encountering the person of Jesus, fostering a deeper relational knowledge of him and a greater desire and the freedom to say ‘yes’ to him. This daily walking with, encountering and fixing your eyes on Jesus is one of the great benefits for those who journey through the Exercises. If you have this same desire to be with Jesus, this book will help you do just that.

### Finding God in all things

Another result of the days, weeks and months spent in the Exercises is a greater awareness of God in the ordinary stuff of everyday life. In fact, those who study Ignatius’ Exercises use the phrase ‘finding God in all things’ as the quintessential summary of them.<sup>4</sup> The daily prayer practices each morning, afternoon and evening, when truly entered into, bring to birth a growing awareness of God within you

and around you. Your spirit becomes sensitised to the movements of God in and through the circumstances and relationships of your life. You gradually begin to develop the spiritual eyesight needed to see ‘the invisible which is eternal rather than merely the visible which is temporal’ (to paraphrase the apostle Paul’s words). You will see your times in the word – at work, at college, at home and with others – through new eyes. And you will begin to realise that it is through these various realities that you are provided with the opportunity to experience God and partner with God’s Spirit in being more and more conformed to the image of Jesus.

This ‘finding God in all things’ is another of the benefits that gradually become internalised over the course of your time in the Exercises and will continue to be a part of internal awareness long after you have finished your journey through the Exercises. You are equipped to live life with the ongoing awareness that in God you live, move and have your being, come what may.

## Developing prayer practices

Finally, as you journey through the Exercises, you will participate in a wide variety of prayer practices. These practices may initially feel cumbersome but will eventually become part of the fabric of your experience in the Exercises and in your life. Although these prayer practices are tied to Ignatius’ Exercises, their value extends beyond the Exercises, and they can be spiritual formation tools that will continue to be a part of your life, shaping and moulding you into Christlikeness long after the Exercises are over. Many of those who have made use of these prayer practices after finishing the formal Exercises have also introduced some of these practices to family and friends.



## Is this book for you?

Prayerfully and honestly work through the statements below, asking God to reveal to you if this book is the right spiritual formation vehicle for you at this time.

- 1 You have a strong desire to know Jesus more intimately, love Jesus more fully and follow Jesus more wholeheartedly.
- 2 You have a longing for a deeper, richer and more expansive relationship with God.
- 3 You desire to live with an internalised awareness that in God you live, move and have your being, and to find God in all things.
- 4 You have the desire, time (50–75 minutes a day, seven days a week for about nine months) and space in your life to engage fully in the Exercises.
- 5 You are willing to be open and honest with God, your spiritual director and yourself as you journey through these Exercises.
- 6 You are willing to follow Jesus during good times and difficult times.
- 7 You are open to having your theology and image of Jesus challenged and expanded.
- 8 You yearn to walk with Jesus through the gospel narratives in a holistic and interactive way rather than merely read about Jesus.
- 9 You are willing to say ‘no’ to whatever holds you back from spiritual freedom.
- 10 You desire to enter into a spiritual practice that will help you better partner with what God is doing in you to conform you to the image of Christ.
- 11 You long for a vehicle that will help you to be more consistent and intentional in spending time with Jesus and connecting with God throughout the day.
- 12 You sense the gentle invitation of God to enter into the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola.

If there is a ‘yes’ that rises from deep within you as you read through the above list, or if you sense the quivering of excitement beginning

to grow in your spirit as you consider the possibility of walking with Jesus through the gospels, or if it is not so dramatic but simply a gentle knowing that this is for you, I strongly encourage you to embark on this journey.

If none of the above is the case, this may not be the right vehicle for you at this time. God works uniquely with each person, and the important thing is not that you are doing this or that, but that you are where God wants you. If this is not the right timing for you, please do not forget about the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, for there may very well be a time when these Exercises will be the exact vehicle for spiritual formation that God desires you to embrace.

## Following the rhythm

As you read through this introduction, you may be getting eager to embark on your journey through the Exercises. Please resist this temptation and slowly make your way through Part 1, which offers an overview of what your daily time with God will look like, important tips on getting the most out of the Exercises, an explanation of the methods you will use to interact with God through the scriptures, an expanded daily rhythm template and some down-to-earth explanations of prayer practices, journalling, the importance of a spiritual director and tips on how to find a spiritual director.

Skipping over Part 1 could very well rob you of many of the benefits associated with going through the Exercises and open you up, to a greater degree, to the struggles that can be experienced. Part 1 will help you be prepared for what is likely to arise during your journey through the Exercises, while also providing excellent tips so you can maximise your experience. You will find that once you are familiar with it, Part 1 will be a place you will revisit throughout your journey through the Exercises, a place filled with wisdom and insight to be drawn upon and used time and time again.

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola have been a valuable spiritual formation tool for almost 500 years, and, in this book, great care has been taken to remain true to the original form and spirit of the Exercises, while also making them readily accessible for those in our day and age who are hungering for more from their Christian life. These exercises will bring you face to face with Jesus, helping you to love Jesus more dearly, follow Jesus more closely and love God and others as never before. Do not grow weary or lose heart as you journey, but keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith, who journeys with you, guiding, directing, enlightening and empowering you.

Please note that Week (with a capital W) does not refer to a seven-day period but rather to a section or movement with the Exercises. Each Week has its own focus.

## NOTES

- 1 Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (HarperCollins, 1998), p. 370.
- 2 David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).
- 3 George E. Ganss, SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992).
- 4 This phrase is not only a goal of the Exercises but also a succinct articulation of Ignatian spirituality.



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