

RELAXING WITH GOD

THE NEGLECTED SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

ANDREW FARLEY



BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1518-2

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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, alivecommunications.com.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

1

My Victoria Secret

I definitely would have gone to jail. You don't just stand up in an auditorium and stop a *Saturday Night Live* star during their comedy routine and get away with it. And especially not with what I planned to say!

I had received a message from God. My task was to interrupt Victoria Jackson's routine and preach the gospel to more than one thousand Furman University students that Friday evening. At the end, I was to lead them in the sinner's prayer.

I sat in my apartment, only a few miles away, agonizing over the call to action. This was the latest in a series of demands that I felt God had placed on me.

Until then, I had complied with every one.

Camp Sin

It all started with my Christian education. I went to chapel every week for thirteen years. And every week throughout

high school, we heard the same thing. Even if the sermon did seem new and fresh at first, it would somehow meander back to the same place.

About two-thirds of the way through, the speaker would tell us we needed to recommit to God, work harder, and do more than we'd been doing. Sometimes this would mean coming forward in front of the whole school and "taking a stand." Other times it would involve some kneeling.

If we were away on a school retreat, they'd offer a ceremonial campfire. Some of us would confess our sins out loud, then write them down, throw the paper into the fire, and watch it burn. No matter what form this purging took, it was sure to include public embarrassment for some, maybe even some wailing for others.

Some would confess their love for rock music, while others would admit they hadn't been doing their quiet times lately. Still others would own up to their lack of boldness when they had an opportunity to share Christ and dropped the ball.

The speakers always seemed pleased to stir up these admissions. I guess they felt they'd been used by God to pull out our sins publicly. You know, into the light.

"This was so great for the kids! We'll definitely have to invite the speaker back next year," we'd hear the teachers whisper.

Pant Legs

Year after year, these events were perpetuating an emotional cycle: commit, try hard, fail, feel horrible, then confess

and recommit to try even harder, only to have your hopes of renewal shattered all over again. It seemed so spiritual, but it set me up for what was to come.

I never took Christianity too seriously in high school, as it appeared to mean sacrificing a lot of fun. At our school, being a good Christian meant your hair was cut above your ears and your pant legs weren't rolled up. In the 1980s, rolling up your pant legs was what the world did. And good Christians didn't want to be of this world.

But physical appearance was only the beginning. There was rule upon rule, and I was left with the impression that you either go all out with this Christianity thing or you just barely squeak by. There was really no sense in landing somewhere in the middle. Therefore, I ignored most of the behavior improvement program. I wanted to enjoy myself in high school, so I stuffed down the shame.

The Addiction

When I started college, I decided that I was tired of feeling like the black sheep in God's family. It was high time that I take my faith seriously. Given what I'd heard, that basically meant two things: Bible study and witnessing. So I began doing those things, and doing them more than anyone else I had ever met.

I started by teaching Bible studies in the campus ministries. Then I progressed to volunteering at the local halfway house, where I witnessed to ex-prisoners and taught them the way to salvation. Then I went off to Greece and Italy to study for a semester. It was there that I began street

witnessing. I'd skip my classes to have more time on the streets to confront people and save their souls. My grades suffered, yes, but in the name of Jesus.

In Europe, the addiction really took root. And upon my return to the United States, things intensified. I shared Christ in jail cells, on airplanes, and even during my university classes. I'd proselytize during gym class as we were working out. And in speech class I'd make presentations, for a grade, on how to get saved.

I got a C on the first speech, and things went south from there. We were assigned to give a variety of speeches throughout the semester—for example, a persuasive speech and a procedural how-to speech. So I tried to *persuade* my classmates to get saved, and then later that semester I showed them the *procedure* for how to get saved. They were going to hear the same thing, over and over again, until they got it.

Whether they liked it or not.

Door-to-Door

On trips home to Virginia, I began witnessing, door-to-door, in my parents' neighborhood. My parents would go to work each day, and then so would I. After all, I was driven. I believed I was going about the Lord's work. So I wouldn't stop. Or I couldn't stop. Or maybe it was both.

Yes, some people were making decisions to believe in Jesus. Whether they truly understood what they were deciding, I'm not sure to this day. And whether God really used any of that, I can't say. But I do know this—as I look

back, I can easily see that it was all for me. It was all about me feeling whole again. It was all about me finding relief from my guilt and shame and doing whatever I needed to do to please God and to get him to like me again. At least until the next hoop I needed to jump through came along.

And the next challenge was always just a bit more grandiose.

The Town and Country

“Son, get in the car and drive away as fast as you can! The restaurant owner called the cops, and they’re coming for you,” my dad said to me with more concern than I had ever seen on his face.

We’d been eating breakfast together in the Town and Country restaurant in New Baltimore, Virginia. It wasn’t that often that I got to enjoy a nice breakfast with my dad, at least not since I had moved away for college. But I ruined breakfast with him that morning, because I stood up and started to preach. Yeah, to the whole restaurant. When I got to the invitation part, some lady said she’d be interested in receiving Christ. So I sat down in her booth and prayed with her while the manager was calling the cops.

Strangely, something good may have come from it. But I was definitely disturbing the peace. And the restaurant owner was *not* happy about it.

The police station wasn’t too far away, so I didn’t have much time. My dad got up to talk with the owner to try to smooth things over. I bolted out the door and escaped to serve God another day.

Comfort Inn

While at home in Virginia, I began working at a Comfort Inn in Chantilly. My job was to mow the lawn, clean the pool, and help with general maintenance. The problem was that although I needed the money, my only real agenda seemed to be saving people.

An airline company was holding a flight attendant training seminar in the hotel conference room. Now, I had shared the gospel numerous times with *individuals* at the hotel, one-on-one. But this was my chance to reach a lot of people, all at once. So I charged into the room without hesitation. I interrupted the speaker midsentence and began shouting the gospel to the roomful of flight attendants.

I was able to utter about fifteen sentences—you know, the essentials—without taking a breath. Then I led them in a prayer of salvation. When I said “Amen” and opened my eyes, the seminar leader said I should come back later if I had more to say. He announced that anyone who wanted to hear more could stay during their lunch break.

When I returned at the break, one lady was waiting for me. She said she was already a Christian, but she admired my boldness. She said she wished she could be like me.

If only she knew.

That was my last day working at the Comfort Inn. Yeah, they fired me. I guess I wasn’t *that* good at cleaning the pool.

The Vienna Metro

The Vienna station was at the end of the subway line that stretched farthest south into Virginia. I’d drive up to the

Park and Ride, buy my ticket, and jump on the train. I knew I'd have a captive audience there.

I'd pick a subway car and ride along to the next station. This gave me a few minutes to yell the gospel at the top of my lungs to the entire train car. I knew my lines really well. I'd tell them they were sinners. I'd tell them Christ died for them. Then I'd tell them he offered new life. I'd even have an altar call of sorts, right there on the train.

I got very little response, but that didn't stop me. I'd hop off at the next stop, pick a new car, and start all over.

Now that's commitment, right? Well, I guess. Maybe those chapel speakers from high school would be proud. Wouldn't they? But why was I so *miserable* inside?

Freezer Aisle

Evangelism had become a drug. I felt great when I'd just shared Christ with someone. And I couldn't wait until the next opportunity.

Literally, I *couldn't* wait.

I'd seek a new high the minute my buzz began fading. I assumed that was the Holy Spirit commanding me to keep moving, to "be radical."

If I went to bed without sharing Christ with someone that day, I couldn't sleep. I'd haul myself out of bed, drive to the nearest twenty-four-hour grocery store, and share Christ with someone in the freezer aisle. But most shoppers were more concerned about escaping from me *and* the coldest section of the store. It didn't work, but it gave

me that warm feeling inside so I could sleep one more night in peace.

That was all that really mattered.

My Victoria Secret

But I had a secret, one that I was very ashamed of at the time. And I hadn't told anyone. I bailed on the God of the universe when he'd sent me on my most important mission yet.

In my mind, God was calling me to interrupt Victoria Jackson's standup comedy routine on a Friday night at Furman University's McAlister Auditorium. I was to climb up onstage in front of my peers, brush little Victoria off to the side, and begin my invitation. This would be the largest audience I had impacted for Jesus!

I didn't even drive over there. I chickened out. And I lay on the floor of my apartment curled up in the fetal position, bawling my eyes out. I had let God down this time, and I knew I'd have to pay. This was the beginning of my crash into a state of religious anxiety and depression that would last for several years.

Relaxing with God

I was doing everything that anyone had ever suggested in order to grow spiritually and feel closer to God. I was praying all the time. I was studying my Bible for hours a day. And believe me, I was sharing my faith!

My belief system was both complicated and exhausting. And it wasn't working. Despite my sincere commitment to

God, I had nothing to show for it. No peace. No joy. No nothing. I was going to heaven, but there was nothing about my present life that appealed to anyone, that's for sure.

That was twenty-three years ago.

Now *everything* has changed. Today, I know exactly how to soak in the unconditional grace of God, to allow his Spirit to flood my mind with thoughts of his love and acceptance. I know how to enjoy my safety and security in Jesus and how to allow God to transmit his radiant life through mine. I no longer battle guilt and fear, and the path ahead is not foggy. Now I celebrate Jesus like never before, and I'd wish my life on anyone.

How did everything change? Did I just ease off or completely stop all spiritual activity? No, today I probably do more talking about Jesus than ever. But things are different on the *inside*. Through my experience of crashing and burning and having to start all over again, God taught me some truths that literally saved my life. He taught me *how* to relax. He taught me that he *wanted* me to relax. And he taught me to *live from rest* in a way that I had never known.

And what God taught me is in this book.