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DEEPEN

YOUR FAITH

BARBARA L. PEACOCK

# Spiritual Practices for SOUL CARE

40 WAYS
TO
DEEPEN
YOUR FAITH

# BARBARA L. PEACOCK



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# TO GILBERT

Thank you for being a loving and caring husband.

Thank you for being a prayer covering, for leading our devotions, and for cooking great meals.

You are an honorable man of God.

# **Contents**

19

# Introduction 13

# PART 1 SOUL CARE LIVING

- 1. Loving Today 21
- 2. Worshiping Today 28
- 3. Praying Today 33
- 4. Lamenting Today 40
- 5. Celebrating Today 45
- 6. Experiencing God Today 49

# PART 2 SOUL CARE DIRECTING 53

- 7. Directing Today 55
- 8. Readying Today 60
- 9. Entering Today 65
- 10. Listening Today 70
- 11. Discerning Today 75
- 12. Maturing Today 80
- 13. Examining Today 86

#### Contents

### PART 3 SOUL CARE DISCIPLING 91

- 14. Reading Today 93
- 15. Teaching Today 99
- 16. Fasting Today 103
- 17. Connecting Today 107
- 18. Serving Today 113
- 19. Mentoring Today 118
- 20. Leading Today 124

### PART 4 SOUL CARE RESTORING 129

- 21. Dwelling Today 131
- 22. Meditating and Contemplating Today 136
- 23. Resting Today 141
- 24. Silencing Today 146
- 25. Commemorating Today 151
- 26. Resurrecting Today 155

## PART 5 SOUL CARE AND SELF-CARING 159

- 27. Exercising Today 161
- 28. Journeying Today 166
- 29. Transforming Today 170
- 30. Chastening Today 174
- 31. Welcoming and Centering Prayer Today 179

# PART 6 SOUL CARE REFLECTING 187

- 32. Journaling and Writing Today 189
- 33. Speaking and Recording Today 193
- 34. Envisioning and Awakening Today 197
- 35. Ruling Today 202
- 36. Thanksgiving Today 207

#### Contents

# PART 7 SOUL CARE LIBERATION 211

- 37. Storytelling Today 213
- 38. Detaching and Attaching Today 217
- 39. Slowing Today 222
- 40. Freeing and Communing Today 226

Conclusion 231 Acknowledgments 235

Do you ever wonder how to draw even closer to God? Do you thirst for a deeper journey within?

Reflect on the current condition of your soul. Take time to simply notice its responses, its longings, its hungers and thirst. Notice how you feel about your relationship with God. Take stock of your inner emotions. Think about whether you feel energized or run-down. Take time to ponder the patterns of your spiritual routines. Have they led you to a place of deeper connection, or do you practice without the sense of wonder you used to feel?

What if I told you that the multiplicity of ways that you care for your soul can immensely impact your relationship with God, others, and, of course, yourself? Within the context of these pages you will find descriptive and applicable forms of traditional and contemporary concepts of spiritual disciplines. *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care:* 40 Ways to Deepen Your Faith is a discipling guide written with you and your soul care journey in mind.

Your day-to-day soul care is an important gift from God. Soul care requires inviting and welcoming God into every facet of your daily life. Today is a great day to invite him into a transparent relationship with you. Pause now and welcome him to abide and dwell within your soul. Remember that he is not pushy and will

not force himself into your life. He is a gentleman and comes in upon your accepting him as the Lover of your soul. Revelation 3:20 says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." Soul care requires having an intentionality of responding to the knock of our most holy God. It provides a loving, listening presence to and for his activity in your life.

With a master's in Christian education and a doctorate in spiritual formation for ministry leaders, I have dedicated decades of my life to learning and implementing the disciplines of the Christian faith. Because of this journey, I pray that this book will provide a transformative experience for you as it ignites and catapults you to abiding in rivers of living water (Ezek. 47:5; John 15:1–4).

It is God's consistent nudging that has prompted me to write about spirituality. From the numerous calls, interviews, podcasts, teaching, and speaking engagements that I have encountered over the past few years, it is evident that more people need to speak more about spiritual practices.

Just like everything else, spirituality has an origin. As an African American author and contemplative, I am mindful of our rich spiritual legacy. Even though I was born in the Western hemisphere, my spiritual roots go back to Africa. As a student of the Word of God it has been on my heart for years to write about spiritual disciplines. I am thankful for all those who have gone before me in all genres of the spiritual and contemplative journey. It is upon their shoulders that I stand in ministry and write.

The forty formative practices in this book are transformational tools for developing personal and internal liberation. Together, we will seek freedom in our daily practices. Truly, it is only through a commitment to formation that our lives become transformed. It is our desire to become more Christlike. We all are descendants of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel. We all are children of the Most High God. Our spirits connect to the same Spirit.

To live a spiritually transformed life, it is essential for each of us to incorporate and implement daily biblical disciplines. As you read this book, you will notice that all the disciplines end in ING. In the English language the suffix -ing denotes that the word is a verb. In the same way that verbs identify actions and reveal a state of being, each of these disciplines is a call to activate and participate in the leading of the Spirit's development in and through you.

As I was sharing the exciting and God-orchestrated ING concept with my husband, Gilbert, I asked him, "What is a good acrostic for ING?" Among friends and family, my husband is known for coming up with the best acrostics, so much so that in 2008 he published a book titled *ISMs*, which stands for *Insightful Spiritual Messages* (messages that are found within the lettering of a word). I knew he would have a great recommendation for me as it relates to this book. Immediately after I asked him for an ISM for ING he said, "*In Need of God*." I thought to myself, "How perfect is that!" Without question or hesitation, I was sold.

It is my prayer that as you travel this ING journey, you will encounter God like never before, for whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, the truth is that we all are in need of almighty God. Without God, life is futile, helpless, and ineffective. All the money or position in the world cannot fulfill the innate desire God has imparted into the soul of his sons and daughters. Living out God's spiritual disciplines offers the best lifestyle. It will not guarantee a perfect life, but it is most assuredly a transformative life.

Numerous spiritual disciplines are found in the canon of Scripture. Over time in the development of spirituality, our forebearers, along with modern-day spiritual leaders, have identified many more disciplines. Their writings provide a wealth of insight for those seeking to be godly disciples. Nonetheless, even with their God-given contributions, the journey of identifying spiritual disciplines continues.

The number 40 is very significant in biblical numerology and is mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. Forty covers a broad

spectrum as it relates to identifying its numerical significance. On one hand, the number 40 implies newness and transformation, and from another perspective, it identifies with a time of examining and testing. In Exodus 34 there is a biblical encounter that exemplifies the meaning of the number 40.

Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. (Exod. 34:28–32)

In this account Moses resides "with the LORD" (v. 28) on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. During this time of testing, Moses fasted from food and drink. He was surely hungry during those forty days, but he endured. Fasting gave him an opportunity to examine himself and draw closer to God. Not only was Moses granted time to reflect on God's activity in his personal life, but Moses had time to think about God's activity with his fellow Israelites (v. 32). As a result of his endurance, Moses's mind, spirit, and soul were renewed, and God blessed his people with a new way of living through the giving of the law. This became the Israelites' new guide for living.

Moses's example of transformation provides a paradigm that you and I can learn from today. These Mosaic characteristics are a key part of the process of developing disciples of Jesus Christ. And engaged discipleship is what *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care* is all about.

The book is divided into seven parts that provide a thematic overview for the forty disciplines. Each chapter explains one discipline and includes a Scripture passage to connect it to everyday living. You will also find an example of a soul care leader whose spiritual journey exemplifies the spiritual practices, a poem I wrote inspired by that discipline, and ways to apply the discipline in your daily walk with the Lord.

By the time you have finished *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care* you will experience forty different transforming spiritual disciplines. There are numerous ways this book can be used. It can be used in the faith community for study or as part of an academic curriculum. The book can be used for individual study, in groups, or with a spiritual director. You can cover one discipline per day, one per week, or move on as you are led. Ultimately, you should go at your own pace and let the Lord guide your exploration and how you incorporate the disciplines in your life.

Whether you are committed to practicing four or all forty spiritual disciplines on a regular basis, you must be mindful that the process for God-centered transformation is designed for those who yearn to live their best authentic life. I wrote *Spiritual Practices for Soul Care* to be a guide in your spiritual formation and liberation. My prayer is that such an engaging lifestyle will lead to an inexplicable freedom in Christ Jesus!

# PART 1

# SOUL CARE Living

Soul care living is rooted and grounded in implementing spiritual practices that nurture your soul. Rather than being caught up in things like materialism and perfectionism, a soul-caring life is centered in God and acknowledges God's loving and caring presence in the everyday. But this does not happen by accident. Soul care living requires intentionality.

It is impossible to live a soul-caring life without acknowledging the Creator of your very soul. You are a soul-filled being, and the soul of your being lives in your physical body. You are gifted with this body, and in this life your assignment is to be a good steward throughout your days.

The soul-caring life is centered in the divine Trinity, God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In his book *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Dr. David Migliore explains that the Trinity is "essentially a *koinonia* of people in love." The Trinity is a loving

1. David L. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 77. The Greek word koinonia refers to the fellowship of believers in the body of Christ.

#### SOUL CARELIVING

community of the three divine persons of the Godhead. Within the Trinity, all three persons of the Godhead love all humanity equally.

Dr. Migliore further expounds that "the Triune God is the living God, and the life of God is a singular act of love." The loving presence of the Trinity is evident. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit operate with one accord as they express their love toward you. All three persons love you equally and unconditionally. Thus, it becomes necessary to embrace the whole Trinity in order for you to live your best life.

A life centered in Trinitarian theology is a life that knows the true meaning of living the good life we all desire!

Soul care living is being receptive to God's perfect will and includes loving, worshiping, praying, lamenting, celebrating, and experiencing God—but most of all, it includes love.

2. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 81.

# ONE

# Loving Today

"I love you."

How many times have you said those words to others?

How many times have those words been said to you?

How many times have you longed to hear those words?

It is amazing how these three powerful words can make such a difference in our lives. The word *love* can bring such pleasure to our ears. It is both a verb and a noun. Love is an action, a demonstration of the sincerity of one's appreciation and care. Love is also an expression of deep feeling and emotions.

Love is the first call to action among the spiritual practices. In fact, practicing love is the prerequisite for the remaining thirty-nine disciplines in this book. The practice of loving is foundational for spiritual maturation and development.

One of the greatest demonstrations of love is found in God's creation. Not long ago, as I sat facing the vast ocean at Myrtle Beach on a cold winter day, my eyes wandered along the horizon, and I was mesmerized by the awesomeness of God's hand-painted creation. The heavens. The sky. The ocean. The beach. The sand. The wind. The sounds. They all represent the infinitude of Elohim, the Creator of the universe.

As I prepared for my morning devotion, I was drawn to Genesis 1:1. It was in the beginning that Elohim created the heavens and the earth. After meditating on this portion of the verse, endless questions began to arise. When did it all begin? What did it look like? How did it all happen? Did Elohim love first or create first? That thought led me to John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (KJV). God so loved. Elohim so created the world that he loved and loves. That moment clarified the answer for me: because God is love and because he created out of love, it is evident that he loved and loves first.

Waking up in the morning is a gift, and for me it is one of the most beautiful times of the day. For years I would just burst out into praise every morning as I expressed to God how much I love and adore him. This was such a daily delight. But one morning, while in this rhythmic praise, I sensed some spiritual brakes. I could hear the screeching in the Spirit. I sensed God saying to me, "Hold up, Barbara. You spend quite a bit of time expressing your love to me. How about you spend some time allowing me to express my love to you?"

This encounter was a game changer because, as you know, love goes both ways. Even though I was telling God how much I loved him, he wanted me to embrace how much he loved me. So I changed my morning ritual and became more aware of his loving presence. I began to receive his love all the more because he is the author of love and love comes from him. He is the very essence of love. It is great to love on God, but it is also important to take time to receive his unconditional love. This one revelation changed the entire flow of my morning praise. God desires our qualitative and quantitative time with him as we bask in his all-consuming love.

God, who *is* love, is the only source of love. Therefore, to give love to the author of love, we must first receive his love from him. Upon receiving his love, we are equipped to reciprocate his unconditional, agape love. It is out of his holy love that we are equipped to love him, ourselves, and others. This foundational concept is

the launching pad for providing effective and loving soul care. This chief cornerstone of love fuels the implementation of other spiritual disciplines.

God's love calls his people to a giving, caring, and nurturing lifestyle. This is the great commandment that is found in Matthew 22:37–40, where Jesus says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

This theology and concept of love is sealed deep within the wells of my spirit. This love did not just pop out of the sky. This kind of love is the love I encountered in my childhood home and farming community. At age fourteen, I clearly remember being excited about giving my life to the Lord. It seems like just a few years ago that I committed my life to the Lord during the 1967 fall revival at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Whiteville, North Carolina. It was there in that wood-framed country church that I was surrounded by a circle of elderly women who were whole-heartedly praying for my salvation. I was in the middle of four praying missionaries who repeatedly told me that Jesus loved me as they encouraged me to invite him into my life to save me. Even after doing farm work all day, they did not let the weariness of their bodies nor the very warm temperature in the church distract them from their mission to "save a soul."

Even now I can hear their southern accents saying, "Jesus loves you, Jesus loves you, Jesus loves you, baby. Just ask him to come into your life and he will save you." They just kept repeating the same thing. I believed it and I received it. On this foundation my faith journey of love began. I thank God for the impartation of Mrs. Essie Best, Mrs. Naomi McKenzie, Mrs. Theresa Goss, and Mrs. Emma Haynes.

I thank God for this beautiful childhood experience, even as I am mindful that not everyone has such an encounter. My life has

been filled with a multiplicity of circumstances, some good and some not so good.

My husband and I have been married over forty years, and even though we love each other, not every day has been filled with marital bliss. Most were filled with joy, but some were filled with tears. I may not feel loved by God nor by my husband every day, but that does not negate the fact that they both love me. Likewise, some days Gilbert may not feel as if I love him, but that does not negate my love for him. Love is more than a feeling. It is a Godgiven fact if it is true love.

All married couples who have been married for an extended period of time have had some difficult days. Love is not perfect, but it is beautiful and requires the tenacity to stay the course, even on difficult days. However, love does not mean you stay in an abusive relationship with anyone.

In her book *Be Kind to Yourself: Releasing Frustrations and Embracing Joy*, Cindy Bunch shares some of her love pains and challenges. Even though her marriage did not turn out to be all that she desired, she remained cognizant of God's unconditional love. Amid her brokenness, she reminds herself that she is "uniquely loved by God." This aspect of love is imperative to a healthy love journey with the Lord and with others. Even though there are bumps in the road, God desires us to be mindful of the uniqueness of his agape love. Even though my marriage is healthy, that does not negate the fact that, like Cindy, I must also remind myself that I am uniquely loved by God. Therefore, I encourage you today to embrace the same truth: *you* are uniquely loved by God. Whether you are single or married, always remember that God loves you just like you are, and he loves you just where you are.

In Psalm 139, the psalmist David lets us know that there is nowhere we can go that God is not already present. No matter

<sup>1.</sup> Cindy Bunch, Be Kind to Yourself: Releasing Frustrations and Embracing Joy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 64.

## Loving Today

where we go, God is there. One of the benefits of his presence is that his love comes with him. The loving, hugging God provides great assurance that he cares for us regardless of our situation or concerns.

God's hugs are secure, and we can never be pried away from his loving presence. Nothing can separate us from this love. In Romans 8:38–39 the apostle Paul writes, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Glory!

Recently, Gilbert and I have been more intentional in expressing our love and appreciation through hugging. As we embark upon a brand-new day, we try to remember to hug each other. And as we end a day, we seal it with a hug or a good-night kiss. As the British would say, "It is quite lovely." Even after more than four decades of marriage, the discovery of representing God in holy matrimony and walking it out continues. For this I am most thankful.

When we abide in the anchored arms of God, it catapults his love into depths of saturation that exceed our comprehension. Resting in God's secure arms launches us into a dimension of his love that exceeds anything we could imagine. I recall feeling his overpowering and overwhelming love one morning when I woke up. I could feel him holding me in his arms. It was breathtaking. I felt totally immersed in his presence. His love filled me until I felt like I could not take anymore. Such love was beyond my comprehension. Now that takes hugging to another dimension!

Pope Benedict XVI believed that the next revival would be birthed through spiritual disciplines: "He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has 'loved us first,' love can also blossom as a response within us." Likewise, I am convinced

<sup>2.</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, accessed May 25, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\_ben-xvi\_enc\_20051225\_deus-caritas-est.html.

#### SOUL CARELIVING

that love spurs the movement for a spiritual awakening. The utmost discipline is love.

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matt. 22:37)

In this verse we encounter the manifestation of God's unconditional love. We see love awakening. This supernatural love reservoir that is designed for you to take into the very fiber of your being is initiated by God. God's love equips and empowers you to love him, yourself, and others. The awareness of this measure of God's love awakens your soul and is the foundational principle of spirituality and soul care.

# SOUL CARE LEADER: Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior

The primacy of love was a prerequisite for the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is fully God and fully man. God is love, and therefore Jesus is love. While he was on earth, love exuded from Jesus's mind, emotions, heart, words, and life. Everything about Jesus fully exemplified his expressions of love. He lived to love and died to love. His life was the perfect model of love.

The greatest commandment of all is to love God, ourselves, and others (Deut. 6:4–9; Matt. 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–31). It is clear from John 3:16 that God loves all people in the world. He does not give one person preferential status over another. Jesus's exemplary model of love takes precedence over any form of love expressed through humanity. As followers of Jesus Christ, it is imperative that we seek to love like he loves. Jesus desires us to express unconditional love in our relationships. This is a lifelong discipline as we seek to be more like him.

# Loving Today

#### THAT'S LOVE

Boy meets girl.

They fall in love.

They get married.

They live happily ever after.

That's Soul Care Loving.

That's Love.

You may say, "I am not married—what about me?"
This is what I would like to share with you:

Friend meets friend.

They are soul mates.

They commit to each other.

They experience a life of kindred spirits.

That's Soul Care Loving.

That's Love.

## LOVING IN ACTION

- 1. Do you have a favorite Scripture passage about the topic of love? If so, what is it and how does it speak to the discipline of love? If you do not have one, is there a saying or song about love that comes to mind?
- 2. Take time to think about other men and women in the kingdom of God whom you believe model the kind of love that Jesus exemplified. What similarities and differences do you notice?