

# Dynamics of the Spiritual Life

Define

Depend

Demonstrate

*A ReVision Resource*

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Dynamics of the Spiritual Life  
A *ReVision* Resource  
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*Dynamics of the Spiritual Life*

Welcome to *Dynamics of the Spiritual Life*

Welcome to *Dynamics of the Spiritual Life*, an overview of what it means to follow Jesus, and a call to a richer, fuller, and more fruitful experience of the life of faith. *Dynamics of the Spiritual Life* is one of our *ReVision* studies in Biblical worldview.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Define

*The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.* 1 Corinthians 15:47, 48

*A spiritual life*

Of course, every Christian will assent to the idea that the Christian life is, in the first instance, a *spiritual* life.

That is, believing in Jesus engages human beings, beginning in *their* spirits, in a new and lively way with God, Who is a *most pure* Spirit.

In Jesus Christ our spirits, or our souls, are renewed; the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell within us; and we are transferred to a spiritual Kingdom, a realm not of this world which unfolds for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in and through our lives (Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17, 18).

Yet while most Christians will *affirm* that the Christian life is a spiritual life, far too few of us actually *understand* or *experience* the spiritual life to which we have been called in Jesus. Nor do many of us practice the dynamics that make the Christian life full, abundant, and fruitful with blessings for ourselves and others.

Yet unless we grasp and practice these dynamics, we will never be able to enjoy the full power and benefit of following Jesus.

*Define, depend, demonstrate*

We can summarize these dynamics under a series of heads, each of which overlaps with the others. The first of these headings is simply *define*.

Before we can *live* the spiritual life, we need to *define* it, to understand the broad scope and full detail of what we have received and what we are called to in Jesus Christ. And, since our spiritual life is eternally greater than anything we could ever imagine, we will need to continue *enlarging* our definition of the life of faith as our understanding and experience grow.

The spiritual life is simply that – life oriented toward, sustained by, experienced within, and expressive of an unseen realm where Jesus Christ reigns as King and Lord. The spiritual life means practicing the Kingship of Jesus.

In the first place, the spiritual life is *oriented* toward Jesus and the unseen realm. We are called to “set our minds” on things that are above, to make Christ in His glory, exalted at the Father’s right hand, and all the other features and creatures of the unseen realm, the continuous North Star for our daily journeys (Col. 3:1-3; Heb. 11:1).

Under the second heading of the dynamics of the spiritual life, we acknowledge our complete *dependence* on spiritual truths and spiritual realities, even to sustain us within the physical world in which we live our spiritual calling from the Lord.

This means that spiritual disciplines, an other-worldly orientation, and the filling of God’s Spirit become more important to us even than our physical needs or our temporal possessions and concerns (Job 23:12; Jer. 15:16). If we do not attend to the disciplines and vision that sustain and grow our spiritual lives, we will never know the fullness and abundance which we have received in Jesus Christ.

The final heading under which the dynamics of the spiritual life may be organized is *demonstration*. The

spiritual life is not just something to talk about with other believers. Believers *demonstrate* the reality of their spiritual renewal through the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the tokens of love, power for witness, mutually-enriching lives in community, a commitment to holiness in obedience to God's Law, and reconciling all things in culture and creation to God and for His glory.

*It's all Jesus*

We thus define the spiritual life in terms of *Christ exalted* as our focus, *Christ indwelling* as our sustaining power, *Christ at work* in and through us as the outcome of our discipleship, and *Christ returning* as the hope which sustains us through the trials and vicissitudes of life.

True spiritual life, in other words, is all about Jesus Christ. This is how the believer defines what has happened in his life as a result of the redeeming and saving work of the Lord. He has come to Jesus, received Jesus, been seated with Jesus in heavenly places, is commissioned and sent by Jesus, indwelt by Jesus, is being transformed into the very image of Jesus, and lives to bring all of life under the rule of King Jesus.

This simple definition will grow and expand as our experience of the spiritual life grows, and we will discover, as it does, that we can never exhaust the beauty, never fathom the full power, never achieve the whole vision, and never express the full glory of the transforming reality of Jesus Christ above, in, and through our lives.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Meditate on Acts 17.1-9. What does it mean that the first Christians “practiced another King, saying Him to be Jesus”?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest rating, how would you evaluate your experience of the spiritual life at this time? Why did you choose that number?
3. If we *define* the spiritual life as God does we will have an increasing *vision* of Christ, His Kingdom, His salvation, and our calling as His disciples. Is this something you feel a need for in your own walk with and work for the Lord? Why or why not?
4. “We thus define the spiritual life in terms of *Christ exalted* as our focus, *Christ indwelling* as our sustaining power, *Christ at work* in and through us as the outcome of our discipleship, and *Christ returning* as the hope which sustains us through the trials and vicissitudes of life.” What do you think of this summary?
5. What are your goals for this study? What do you hope to learn?

*Next steps: When and how did you enter into this spiritual life in Christ? Share your story with a Christian friend, and invite him or her to share as well.*

*Prayer:*

## 2 Desire

*One thing I have desired of the LORD,  
That will I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
All the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the LORD,  
And to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27.4*

### *The Christian's calling*

The Christian's calling is to a life oriented to, focused on, sustained by, and expressive of Jesus Christ, the risen and exalted Son of God, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

True spirituality begins in this definition; anything less than this is something other than Christian discipleship. Christian discipleship means practicing the Kingship of Jesus in every area of our lives, seeking and advancing His Kingdom, growing in His grace, and living as His disciples and witnesses.

This definition will grow and expand as our relationship with the Lord grows, so that while we can always *understand* the life to which we are called, we can never *exhaust* it fully.

Having defined spiritual life, we turn to the next crucial dynamic for living according to our definition: *dependence*. It is not enough to *know* what the spiritual life is all about, nor even to continue accumulating information and insights concerning its nature. Unless we truly *depend* on the Lord to empower us to live the spiritual life, all our knowledge about it will be little more than intellectual trimmings to an empty and unfruitful existence. Depending on the Lord begins with *desiring* the spiritual life above all else.

### *One thing*

The Apostle Paul expressed the same idea as King David when he wrote, "but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3.13, 14). He went on to add that this is the way mature believers think about their lives.

We must decide whether such a life of looking to Jesus, being filled with Jesus, and being transformed into the image of Jesus is what we really want in life. We must move, that is, from *defining* the spiritual life to *depending* on God to help us experience and express it. And *desire* is the vehicle that takes us into such dependence.

This is not as easy as it might seem. Many worldly distractions and diversions clamor for our attention, time, and strength. Spiritual forces of wickedness in high places whisper subtle lies into our souls, suggesting that we don't want to be religious fanatics and that, after all, no one else seems to be all that serious about living the spiritual life.

Moreover, our secular age certainly makes light of this calling, and the pressures of getting by and making it in our materialist society can consume our time and strength, so that we have little left over for the spiritual life.

But all these are just other ways of saying that, when push comes to shove in our lives, what we are really depending on, and what we really *desire* are the things of this world rather than the things of Christ and His Kingdom. The "one thing" that occupies us is not contemplating, resting in, and enjoying the Lord, but making do as best we can in the getting-and-spending-here-and-now of our everyday lives.

*Desiring the spiritual life*

We will engage the spiritual life to which we've been called when, focused on Jesus and resting in Him, we begin to *desire* this life as the defining mark of our experience in the world. And the more we desire the spiritual life, the more we will depend on the Lord to deliver it.

Desiring the spiritual life begins and grows by contemplating the beauty of the Lord, tasting of the joy and pleasure that are to be found in His presence (Ps. 16.11). This is the work of prayer and reading slowly and reflectively through the Word of God. Desire for the Lord grows through time spent with Him, and all such time spent with Him increases our trust in Him and, hence, our dependence on the Lord and His Word. Thus we come to know the riches of His love and power, working down into our souls and coming to expression in our lives (Rom. 11.33-36; Eph. 3.20; Jn. 7.37-39).

But we must make up our minds that this – *this* life of following Jesus – is what we *desire* above anything and everything else. The rich young ruler, we recall, turned away from Jesus because he was still trusting in his considerable wealth and worldly indulgences. “Near to the Kingdom” is as close as he came. We will not make progress in the spiritual life until, desiring the Lord more than the things of this world, we begin to depend on Him for every aspect of our lives.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What is “desire”? Where does it come from? How does it function in our lives?
2. How does *what* we desire come to expression in our lives? What does this tell us about the way we define our lives?
3. What does it mean to “contemplate the beauty of the Lord”? What about the Lord is beautiful? How would you show a new believer what it means to “contemplate” this?
4. What are some of the obstacles we need to overcome in learning to desire the true spiritual life as our highest priority in life?
5. What does it mean to “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”? How do you do this each day?

*Next steps: How much of the time of your week is devoted to seeking the Lord and spending time with Him? Talk with a church leader about this question, and seek advice for improving your time in pursuit of “this one thing.”*

*Prayer:*



### 3 Deny

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord... Philipians 3.7, 8*

#### *The spiritual life*

We are grouping the various dynamics of the spiritual life under three general and overlapping headings: define, depend, and demonstrate.

The first two headings of the spiritual life are easy enough. First, we must be clear about the life to which we are called; we must *define* spiritual life as God does – a life focusing on, sustained by, and expressive of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ. We must say as Paul did, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2.20).

Then we must *depend* on the Lord, beginning with *desiring* this life above all else. We must say to ourselves, and be renewed daily in this resolve: “This is what I want my life to count for all my days.”

It’s when we get to the next dynamic of the spiritual life that things begin to become more difficult; for the next dynamic requires that we *deny* everything in our lives that hinders, obstructs, or supplants the life of following Jesus Christ. As Paul put it, we must learn to “count everything as loss” that keeps us from looking to Jesus, being filled with Jesus, and living for Jesus in every area of our lives, all the time.

We will never fully *depend* on the Lord until we deny, set aside, and count as loss everything else on which we might depend for the joy and purpose we seek.

#### *Time and activities*

In order to do this it can help us to recognize that, at bottom, our lives consist of two primary components: time and activities. Everything we are and do amounts to these.

It has pleased God to give each one of us the same amount of time each day, week, month, and year. Time is a gift of God, and He expects us to use it wisely, in ways that overcome the foolishness of living apart from God and glorify Him in all the details of our lives (Ps. 90.12; Eph. 5.15-17; 1 Cor. 10.31). What we do in the time God gives us amounts to various kinds of activities – eating, sleeping, working, talking, reading, and so forth. Who we are, how we define our being-in-the-world, and what we’re actually depending on in life will come to the surface in the *activities* of the *time* of our lives.

The challenge of the spiritual life is to *claim* all our time and *construct* all our activities in order to pursue what we desire as the life of following Jesus. Anything that doesn’t contribute to that objective distracts from it.

Certainly there are necessities in each of our lives – caring for our bodies, making a living, taking care of our homes and families, and so forth. But these are not merely worldly activities, at least not for the Christian. Even these must be pursued according to the priorities of the risen Christ and His Kingdom, so that they further our objective.

But we must not allow into our time any activities that are merely frivolous, mundane, worldly, sinful, or otherwise not in line with the spiritual life to which we have been called. To do so is simply to cling to the crutches of this secular age to help us make our way in life. We must throw those crutches away and depend on the strong hand of King Jesus to lead us into the joy, meaning, and purpose in life we seek.

*The time of your life*

As we make our plans and review our daily lives, we must *deny* any time to interests and activities which flow against our spiritual calling in Jesus Christ. In their place we must put activities and disciplines which will further our pursuit of that life, and which enable us to transform even such mundane activities as we must engage so that they become critical components in expressing the life of Christ.

What do the time and activities of your life reveal about what you *desire* in life and what you're *depending* on to give your life purpose and joy? Paul instructs us to pay careful attention to how we use our time, and to make sure we *deny* any time for anything that might blur our focus, divert our path, or compromise our vision and pursuit of King Jesus (Eph. 5.15-17).

This dynamic of denying must become a daily, and even a moment-by-moment practice if we are to make progress in our desire to know the Lord and true spiritual life in Him.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Meditate on Matthew 16.24, 25. Explain the terms, “deny” and “take up.”
2. What does it mean to “deny” ourselves in each of the following areas:
  - Our thinking (minds)?
  - Our affections (hearts)?
  - Our priorities and values (conscience)?
  - Our words and deeds?
3. “The challenge of the spiritual life is to *claim* all our time and *construct* all our activities in order to pursue what we desire as the life of following Jesus.” What would you recommend as some good ways to improve in doing this?
4. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. Explain what Paul intends for us here with respect to the time of our lives:
5. “This dynamic of denying must become a daily, and even a moment-by-moment practice if we are to make progress in our desire to know the Lord and true spiritual life in Him.” Do you agree? Why or why not? If so, how will you practice this?

*Next steps: What is your approach to “making the most” of the time God gives you each day? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.*

*Prayer:*

## 4 Determine

*...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...* Hebrews 12.1, 2

### *Number our days*

The spiritual life is life in Jesus Christ, our risen and reigning Savior and King. We are *in* Him and He is *in* us, and we are learning to *desire* Him and *deny* whatever keeps us from *depending* solely on Him for full and abundant life.

The next dynamic of the spiritual life, which also falls under the heading of depending on the Lord, looks from the far horizon of the exalted Christ to the day-to-day details of our own unique callings. Here we *determine* the best course of action we need to take, in every area of our lives, if we are to gain the thing we most desire, a fuller and more fruitful life in the Lord.

We will have already begun to identify the kinds of things we must deny in order to make progress in this journey. Now we must prayerfully and thoughtfully determine which activities should fill our time, and which goals we must pursue in order to grow in the spiritual life. Moses prayed, “So teach *us* to number our days,/That we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12). This is what we also must do – *determine* the best course and the best practices to get us where we desire to be in the life of faith.

Here our *dependence* on the Lord overflows into the ways we *demonstrate* the spiritual life so as to reflect the Lord’s *definition* of what it means to follow Jesus.

### *The disciplines of life*

In determining the best course for daily living the spiritual life we *discipline* the time and activities of our lives according to the priorities and in the power of our risen King. What disciplines does this involve?

First, of course, are the *spiritual* disciplines we need to practice in order to keep a proper focus and draw on the resources of Christ to sustain us in the life of faith. These include prayer, reading and meditating in Scripture, worship, fellowship with other believers, fasting and singing, and so forth. Each of us needs to determine a proper regimen of spiritual disciplines, one that will help to ensure that we make steady progress in the race God has set before us.

Second, we need to determine which should be the primary disciplines which will enable us to *love our neighbor* as ourselves. What do we need to do each day in order to get to know our neighbors, love and serve them, and make the most of every opportunity to share our faith in Christ with them? Unless we determine the specific actions and practices loving our neighbors will require, we’ll certainly never get around to fulfilling this most basic Christian duty.

Then there are disciplines *related to the work* God has given us to do. Whatever our work in the Lord’s Kingdom, it must be characterized by excellence, thoroughness, diligence, efficiency, and fruitfulness. Our work is not merely a “job.” The work we’ve been given to do is greater than the “job” at which we work, and all our work requires that we master the disciplines essential to glorifying God in this arena.

We must also master the disciplines of *living together* in the Body of Christ. Here it is above all crucial that each believer discover, develop, and deploy his or her spiritual gifts for the edification of the entire community.

Last, we must master such *provisional disciplines* as will enable us to grow through temptations, trials, setbacks, failings, and the like. We need to learn how to *recognize* temptation, *resist* the devil, *repent* and *be renewed* in the

Lord, and so forth. If we do not have these disciplines at the ready when the time comes we need them, we will struggle to make progress in the spiritual life.

*Keep on growing*

In all these disciplines we must determine ways that we need to grow in the Lord, improve our walk with Him, and make progress in bearing fruit for His glory. We can always improve our use of all the disciplines of the life of faith, and we must determine, day by day, that we will focus on Jesus and work to bring each area of our lives into line with Him.

The dynamic of determining the course God has set for us is extremely important, and we must monitor and improve it every day of our lives. We must know where we are heading, what the landmarks are that will indicate progress, and where we need to grow and change, if we are to seek the Lord's help in running the particular race He has set down for each of us.

This again is a matter of prayer, of seeking the wisdom and counsel of others, and of trying new directions, seeking new objectives, and striving for new heights of growth and fruitfulness in the Lord.

The more determined we are in each of these areas, the stronger will be our dependence on the Lord Who has saved us.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Let's say you *determine* to take a place to a distant city. Outline the steps involved in making and carrying out that determination:
2. How would you apply your answer to the first question to living the spiritual life?
3. Review the *disciplines* outlined in this lesson. How conscious are you of seeking the Kingdom and living the spiritual life in all these areas? Where do you need to improve?
4. T. M. uses words like "grow" and "improve" and "make progress" with respect to our walk with and work for the Lord. Do you agree with this emphasis? Why or why not?
5. Briefly discuss the relationship between the terms *define*, *desire*, *deny*, and *determine* as T. M. is using them in this study:

*Next steps: How many of the various disciplines mentioned in this article are you actually practicing as "unto the Lord"? Where do you need to improve? Ask a pastor or church leader to guide you in thinking about this.*

*Prayer:*

## 5 Detox

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Try me, and know my anxieties;  
And see if there is any wicked way in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting.* Psalm 139.23, 24

### *Define, depend, demonstrate*

Having defined the life of faith, and now beginning to depend on the Lord by denying the world and determining a proper course for the time of our lives, we will begin to *demonstrate* the reality of the spiritual life in all our words and deeds.

The goal of all Christian instruction is love for God and neighbors (1 Tim. 1.5). In all our time, through all our activities we want to demonstrate that Jesus really is alive, really lives in us, and really rules the world unto the glory of God. Everything about us – how we relate to others, do our work, participate in culture, and so forth – will show the hope we have in Jesus by honoring and glorifying God (1 Pet. 3.15; 1 Cor. 10.31).

### *Interruptions*

But our demonstration of the spiritual life will not be without interruptions. From time to time in the spiritual life our little vessels of faith sail into the doldrums. We find ourselves becalmed; the wind of the Spirit flags, our spiritual sails droop, and we're not making any progress in the life of faith.

At such times it may well be that something has worked its way into our lives that has no business there – some distraction from our focus, or, worse, some sin blinding our vision and sapping our strength. These times can come upon us suddenly and last for extended seasons – what some have referred to as the “dark night of the soul.”

It's best, in pursuing the spiritual life, to take time on a regular basis to *detox* our systems of any foreign or unwelcome substances that can keep us from making progress in the Lord. Spiritual detoxing is a way of depending on the Lord and demonstrating our trust in Him so that we can move from the doldrums of faith back into the steady wind of God's Spirit.

### *Detox disciplines*

Here we must learn to use the disciplines of solitude, confession, and repentance.

Let's start with *solitude*. The Lord Jesus understood the value of being alone with His Father for extended seasons. Not that He ever needed cleansing from any sin; however, His course of life was a difficult slog, and He often retreated to mountains or desert places where He could be alone to reflect, listen, and commune with God.

Such times of “getting away with the Lord” can be renewing for us as well, and can provide an opportunity for detoxing our spiritual systems of any sin or neglect that may cause us to hit the doldrums.

While the practice of extended seasons of solitude may be only infrequent in our lives, the practice of *confession* and *repentance* will be needed almost every day.

We are redeemed by the grace of the Lord, but we must never forget that we are sinners still (1 Jn. 1.8-10). We continue to sin, frequently ignore the Lord or deny His leading, and are prone to revert to the ways of the world that we loved so well before we knew Jesus Christ. Confession and repentance are the way to detox our souls.

In confession we listen as the Spirit of God searches our hearts and minds for affections, thoughts, ideas, or attitudes that may not be pleasing to God; or as He brings to mind things we've said or done – or failed to do – that we will need to amend. When the Spirit convicts us of sin, our task is to agree with Him – the meaning of the Greek word, “confess” – and then to repent and chart a course of good thoughts, attitudes, or works to replace the wicked ones He has brought to light.

Time alone with the Lord can lead to cleansing experiences of confession. But confession must lead to repentance as we *depend* on the Lord's forgiveness and leading, and move to *demonstrate* our desire and determination to live for Him once again.

Thus, through confession and repentance we detox our spiritual lives of debilitating influences and are established once again on the course God has chosen for our lives. This discipline will always be necessary in the spiritual life, so we should learn to practice it often and well.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What does T. M. mean by “detox”? How is this an aspect of “depending” on the Lord for a richer, fuller, and more fruitful spiritual life?
2. Meditate on John 16.8-11. When the Spirit is working within us, what kind of “conviction” should we expect from Him?
3. What's the difference between confession and repentance? Can you have one without the other? Explain:
4. Meditate on 1 John 1.8-10. Why is “detoxing” a necessary, daily discipline? What do we gain by practicing it?
5. What are we depending on God for as we detox? How are we demonstrating love for Him and others as we do?

*Next steps: How can believers help one another in these “detox disciplines”? Talk with a few of your Christian friends about this question.*

*Prayer:*

## 6 Depend

*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6.2*

### *One-anothering*

God has established the spiritual life so that one way we *depend* on Him and *demonstrate* His love to the world is by *depending* on one another in the Body of Christ.

We are not alone in the spiritual life. We are members of the Body of Christ and share together in the fellowship of His suffering and resurrection glory. We need one another. We are instructed to teach one another, love one another, admonish one another, correct one another, care for one another, bear one another's burdens, and stimulate one another to love and good works. "One-anothering" is thus an important component of the spiritual life.

If we try to live the spiritual life without depending on other believers to teach, support, direct, correct, assist, and guide us, we are certain to be in the doldrums more than is necessary.

Paul says believers are to bear one another's burdens. Solomon taught that, like iron sharpening iron, believers need one another if they are to continue to make progress in the spiritual life. Jesus said we must love and serve one another if we would fulfill our callings in His Kingdom.

Learning to *depend* on other believers is both a way of depending on the Lord and of demonstrating the love we share in together in the Body of Christ.

### *Soul friends*

The ancient Celtic Christians emphasized the importance of having what they called a *soul friend*. Saint Brigit is reported to have said that "A man without a soul friend is like a body without a head."

What is a soul friend, and how can having one help you to practice the dynamic of depending on other believers?

A soul friend is someone who cares about your soul as much as you do, and for whose soul you are just as concerned. Soul friends agree to journey together in the spiritual life, sharing what they are learning or what concerns them, encouraging one another in *desiring* the life of faith, helping each other *deny* those things that get in the way of following Christ, holding one another accountable for the things they have *determined* to pursue, and working together to expand and extend their *definition* of the spiritual life.

Soul friends may be helpful in each other's life by calling attention to areas of sin or neglect of the spiritual life. Thus they can prove to be a valuable agent of ongoing spiritual *detoxification*.

A soul friend, in other words, can be an extremely valuable addition to your journey in the spiritual life.

### *Finding a soul friend*

But where do we look to find a soul friend?

Husbands and wives should be soul friends, of course, but each may wish to acquire a soul friend of the same sex to complement that most basic relationship. In seeking a soul friend look for someone you trust, respect, and will enjoy spending time with in conversation and prayer.

Soul friends get together regularly and talk freely about their struggles and victories. They study the Scriptures

together and share challenges, concerns, and questions about how to keep growing in the life of faith. Soul friends pray together, and they'll pray for one another when they are apart. They help one another set goals in the life of faith, and they hold one another accountable for their time and activities.

It can be a challenge learning to depend on other believers in this way, and everyone should be careful and prayerful about entering into a soul friend relationship. However, both the Old and New Testaments provide teaching and examples of the importance of this dynamic of the life of faith. David and Jonathan, Daniel and his friends, Jesus and the disciples, Paul and Silas, Timothy, Titus, Clement, and the others – these show us the value soul friendships can provide for helping us to get the most out of the spiritual life.

So let us take up this challenge of learning to depend on those who love us, and who depend on us to love them as well.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. In what ways must church members learn to depend on one another in the spiritual life?
2. Why is this so important? Meditate on John 17.21 and Ephesians 4.3. What do these suggest about the importance of our depending on one another?
3. What do you think it would take for you to be a soul friend to another believer? Are you willing to take on this calling?
4. How does depending on our fellow believers demonstrate the reality of the resurrection life of Christ? What can we do in our churches to encourage more of this?
5. What obstacles will we face as we work to depend more consistently on one another? How can we overcome these?

*Next steps: Do you have a soul friend? If so, share this study with your soul friend and invite him or her to work through it with you. You can download the complete study by clicking the link below.*

*Prayer:*



## 7 Delight

*Delight yourself also in the LORD,  
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring it to pass.* Psalm 37.4, 5

### *The spiritual life*

In this series we have been trying to understand, access, and improve our experience of the spiritual life. Our approach has been to simplify and organize the life of faith under three headings, define, depend, and demonstrate.

It's important that we work daily to *define* our understanding of Christ, His Kingdom, His salvation, and His calling for our lives. The better we define such matters, the clearer will become our vision of the Lord and His glory, and this will help us want to *depend* on Him more fully.

Depending on the Lord involves *desiring* Him above all else, *denying* everything in our lives that keeps us from moving toward Him and His Kingdom, *determining* a course for each day and all the time and activities of our lives, and continually *detoxing* from any sin that may have found a way into our souls.

As we thus define our faith more clearly and depend on the Lord more consistently, we can expect to *demonstrate* His power in words and deeds of love for God and our neighbors.

Thus, the spiritual life is a life of looking to, serving, and obeying our Lord and King, Jesus Christ. And you can be sure of this: This way of life, the spiritual life, is the way of true joy and delight.

### *Delighting in the Lord*

Jesus promised full and abundant life to all who follow Him (Jn. 10.10). In His presence we may know fullness of joy and holy pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11). As we experience this true spiritual life more completely, we will rejoice to say with the Apostle Paul, "For me to live is Christ!" (Phil. 1.21). Following Jesus is demanding, difficult, and draining at times; but following Him leads to the true *delight* every person earnestly desires in life.

The psalmist promises that if we *delight* ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the *desires* of our heart. Don't miss the beauty of this simple word of promise. First, we must know, see, fear, adore, and clearly perceive the Lord. We must *define* our goal and objective in life as the "one thing" David and Paul desired above all else – life with and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then we can *delight* in Him by all the ways He shows us how to *depend* on Him. And living this way has a self-reinforcing dynamic to it. The more we delight in the Lord by desiring Him, denying sinful ways, determining to walk in His steps, and detoxing from all sins, the more we know the delight He has created us to know. And guess what: The more we delight in this Lord in this way, the more we *desire* Him in our hearts. And when we desire Him in our hearts the way He intends we should, then He will give us those desires, increasing our vision of the Lord, our dependence on Him, and our ability to demonstrate the life-transforming reality of the spiritual life.

### *So, how's it going?*

What a privilege and blessing to be a people called to such a life in Jesus Christ!

Is this your experience as a believer? Do you delight in the Lord in this way, so that you desire Him more and more, and He meets your desires by giving more of Himself to you day by day?

This is what God has planned for you, and nothing in this life even remotely compares to the utter and complete delight of living in Jesus Christ.

Make sure you have defined your Christian life in line with God's definition. Then discipline your heart to love the Lord, the vision of Whose glory and power and goodness and beauty is growing clearer to you every day. Take up the disciplines of depending on the Lord, so that you demonstrate the resurrection life of Jesus more consistently every day.

Then rest back in the arms of our Savior and King, and delight in the full and abundant life – the *spiritual* life – for which He lived, died, rose again, and reigns in glory.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What does it mean to “delight” in something or someone? How can we cultivate such delight?
2. Why should we expect the spiritual life to be our reliable source of delight in this life?
3. What does it mean to “delight yourself in the Lord”?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to apply that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Next steps: Make a copy of the PDF of this study for several of your friends. Challenge them to read through it, work through the questions for reflection or discussion, and meet together in a week or so to discuss what they've learned..*

*Prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.