

SPIRITUAL FORMATION RESOURCES

Platt Park Church

BOOKS

Entry Level

Practicing the Way – John Mark Comer (2024) A practical, accessible guide to the ancient rhythms of being with Jesus, becoming like him, and doing as he did. Comer draws on the apprenticeship model of discipleship, arguing that spiritual formation is less about trying harder and more about restructuring your life around Jesus through practices like sabbath, silence, and prayer.

The Ragamuffin Gospel – Brennan Manning (1990) A grace-saturated call to receive God's unconditional love, especially for those who feel broken or unworthy. Manning writes with disarming vulnerability, pushing back against performance-based religion and inviting readers into the scandalous freedom of grace.

The Jesus I Never Knew – Philip Yancey (1995) A fresh, searching look at the life of Jesus that strips away centuries of cultural familiarity to reveal how surprising, disruptive, and beautiful he actually is. Yancey writes with journalistic curiosity and deep honesty, making this an excellent book for skeptics, seekers, and longtime believers alike.

Abba's Child – Brennan Manning (1994) An exploration of what it means to rest in the tender embrace of God as "Abba" — Father — rather than performing for a distant or demanding deity. Manning introduces the concept of the "impostor self" and calls readers to drop their masks and live from their true identity as beloved children of God.

The Good and Beautiful God – James Bryan Smith (2009) An introductory exploration of spiritual formation built around replacing false narratives about God with true ones. Each chapter pairs a theological portrait of God with a practical "soul training" exercise, making it ideal for small groups or personal study.

Sacred Pathways – Gary Thomas (1996) Identifies nine distinct temperaments through which people naturally draw closer to God — from naturalists and activists to contemplatives and intellectuals. It frees readers from a one-size-fits-all approach to devotion and helps them lean into how God actually wired them.

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality – Peter Scazzero (2006) Connects emotional health and contemplative spirituality, arguing you can't be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally

immature. Scazzero draws on his own painful leadership failures to show how unexamined wounds, family systems, and emotional immaturity quietly sabotage our walk with God.

The Life of the Beloved – Henri Nouwen (1992) A brief, warm invitation to see yourself as God sees you — chosen, blessed, broken, and given — written originally for a secular friend. It's one of Nouwen's most accessible works and serves as a gentle on-ramp to his deeper writing on identity and belovedness.

With – Skye Jethani (2011) Challenges four common but ultimately hollow postures toward God — living for, from, over, or under him — and makes the case that life *with* God is the heart of the gospel. It's an accessible diagnostic tool for recognizing how easily we turn God into a means to an end rather than the end himself.

The Return of the Prodigal Son – Henri Nouwen (1992) Inspired by a long, contemplative encounter with Rembrandt's famous painting, Nouwen explores the parable of the prodigal son as a map of the human soul's journey home to God. It is one of his most beloved works, helping readers see themselves in each character — the younger son, the elder son, and ultimately the welcoming father.

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry – John Mark Comer (2019) Argues that hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life and offers practical ways to slow down and abide in Christ. Drawing on Dallas Willard, Comer diagnoses the exhausting pace of modern life and prescribes four classical spiritual disciplines as the antidote.

Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools - Tyler Staton- 2022) An invitation to rediscover prayer as a living, transformative relationship with God rather than a religious obligation. Drawing from Scripture, historic Christian practices, and personal experience, Tyler Staton explores the wonder, mystery, and power of prayer—helping readers move beyond disappointment, distraction, and self-reliance into a deeper life of listening, trust, participation, and communion with God.

The Pursuit of God – A.W. Tozer (1948) A passionate, devotional classic calling believers out of nominal Christianity into genuine, firsthand experience of God. Tozer writes with prophetic intensity, mourning a Christianity that knows about God but has lost the ache for God himself.

Mere Christianity – C.S. Lewis (1952) Originally delivered as BBC radio talks during World War II, this beloved classic makes a clear, reasonable, and winsome case for the Christian faith before exploring what the life of discipleship actually looks like. Lewis's clarity, wit, and intellectual honesty make it one of the most widely read introductions to Christian belief and practice ever written.

Let Your Life Speak – Parker Palmer (1999) A quiet, honest reflection on vocation and identity, encouraging readers to listen to what their own life is trying to tell them. Palmer weaves in his

own experience of depression and vocational crisis, making a compelling case that true calling emerges from self-knowledge, not self-invention.

Learning to Pray – James Martin, SJ (2021) A warm, practical introduction to prayer drawing on Ignatian spirituality, written accessibly for beginners and experienced pray-ers alike. Martin covers a wide range of prayer forms — meditation, contemplation, journaling, praying with scripture — with concrete examples and honest discussion of dryness and distraction.

Mid Level

Sacred Rhythms – Ruth Haley Barton (2006) Introduces seven spiritual disciplines — including solitude, scripture, prayer, sabbath, and discernment — as a framework for arranging daily life around genuine transformation and intimacy with God. Barton writes as both a practitioner and a spiritual director, grounding each practice in both theology and real-life application.

The Critical Journey – Janet Hagberg & Robert Guelich (1989) Maps six stages of faith development — from the recognition of God through productive life, the journey inward, the wall, the journey outward, and finally a life of love — helping readers understand where they are and what's needed to move deeper. It's particularly helpful for people experiencing spiritual dryness or what feels like a crisis of faith, reframing it as a necessary passage rather than a failure.

The Gift of Being Yourself – David G. Benner (2004) A concise guide to self-discovery as a spiritual practice, exploring how true identity is found only in God. Benner, a Christian psychologist, shows how our false selves — built on roles, achievements, and approval — must be surrendered before we can receive the self God has always known and loved.

Soul Keeping – John Ortberg (2014) Drawing heavily on the wisdom of Dallas Willard — Ortberg's own mentor — this book makes a compelling case for why the care of the soul is the most important thing a person can attend to. Warm, accessible, and pastorally rich, it serves as an excellent bridge between popular Christian living and deeper formation thinking.

Surrender to Love – David G. Benner (2003) Explores how perfect love casts out fear and invites readers into a deeper surrender to God's transforming love. Benner argues that authentic Christian spirituality is not primarily about discipline or willpower but about allowing ourselves to be loved into transformation.

Soulful Spirituality – David G. Benner (2011) Integrates psychology and Christian spirituality to explore what it means to become fully and deeply human through union with God. Benner challenges a disembodied or overly pious spirituality, arguing that genuine holiness embraces the full range of human experience — body, emotion, relationship, and imagination.

The Deeply Formed Life – Rich Villodas (2020) Offers five countercultural values — contemplative rhythm, racial reconciliation, sexual wholeness, interior examination, and missional presence — as markers of genuine Christ-formation. Villodas, a pastor in New York City, writes with pastoral warmth and prophetic edge, showing how formation is never merely personal but always communal and justice-oriented.

Discovering Our Spiritual Identity – Trevor Hudson (2010) A reflective guide to understanding who we are in Christ, combining spiritual direction insights with practical exercises. Hudson gently dismantles the identities we construct from performance and comparison, pointing readers toward a grounded, grace-rooted sense of self.

Sacred Fire – Ronald Rolheiser (2014) Addresses the spirituality of the second half of life, focusing on mature discipleship, selfless love, and learning to give your life away rather than build it up. Rolheiser argues that the great spiritual task of midlife and beyond is moving from achieving to blessing others — from the "sacred fire" of early passion to the steadier flame of faithful love.

The Holy Longing – Ronald Rolheiser (1999) A serious and substantive introduction to Christian spirituality structured around four non-negotiable pillars: private prayer, social justice, mellowness of heart, and community. Rolheiser is theologically rich and culturally aware, making this an excellent bridge between popular spirituality and more classical formation thinking.

Invitation to a Journey – M. Robert Mulholland (1993) A foundational text on spiritual formation, defining it as the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others — not merely for personal benefit. Mulholland draws on personality typology and scripture to show how our very weaknesses and opposites are often the primary sites of God's transforming work.

Transformed into Fire – Judith Hougen (2002) Draws on the Desert Fathers and the contemplative tradition to explore how our true identity as God's beloved is forged through suffering, surrender, and transformation. Hougen writes with both theological depth and personal honesty, showing how the fires of difficulty strip away the false self and reveal who we truly are in Christ.

The Divine Conspiracy – Dallas Willard (1998) Willard's most comprehensive vision of what it means to live as an apprentice of Jesus in the kingdom of God — not just believing the right things, but actually living differently. Dense, rewarding, and paradigm-shifting, it challenges the reduction of Christianity to mere sin-forgiveness and reclaims discipleship as a whole-life transformation.

The Great Omission – Dallas Willard (2006) Argues that intentional discipleship — not just conversion or church attendance — has been largely missing from modern Christianity, and calls

the church back to the Great Commission understood as making apprentices of Jesus. A sobering but hopeful diagnosis of why so many Christians show so little actual transformation.

Knowing God – J.I. Packer (1973) A rich, theologically serious exploration of who God actually is — his attributes, his ways, his relationship with humanity — written with both scholarly depth and pastoral warmth. Packer argues that knowing God is the greatest privilege and the most transforming pursuit available to any human being.

The Contemplative Pastor – Eugene Peterson (1989) A quietly countercultural manifesto for pastoral ministry — and really for any Christian life — built around unhurried attention to God, Scripture, and people rather than the frantic busyness of institutional religion. Peterson's prose is itself a kind of spiritual formation, slow and beautiful and full of earthy wisdom.

A Hidden Wholeness – Parker Palmer (2004) Explores the divided life — the gap between the person we present to the world and the soul within — and how to create "circles of trust" where the soul feels safe enough to speak and be heard. Palmer draws on Quaker spirituality and his own vocational journey to offer a vision of community that honors both solitude and solidarity.

The Inner Voice of Love – Henri Nouwen (1996) A deeply personal spiritual journal written during Nouwen's most anguishing crisis of depression and abandonment, originally kept private but later shared as a gift to others in pain. Each short entry reads like a word from God to the wounded soul, making it a powerful companion for anyone walking through darkness.

Everything Belongs – Richard Rohr (1999) Introduces contemplative prayer and Rohr's "alternative orthodoxy" — the practice of seeing reality whole, including pain, failure, and darkness, as held within God's loving embrace. Rohr challenges the dualistic, either/or thinking that dominates much of Western Christianity and invites readers into a more spacious, non-grasping way of being.

Mansions of the Heart – Tom Ashbrook (2009) A practical and accessible guide to Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, translating her seven-mansion map of the soul's journey into language and categories modern readers can navigate. Particularly useful for spiritual directors or anyone trying to understand the classical stages of contemplative development.

The Imitation of Christ – Thomas à Kempis (~1418) One of the most widely read devotional classics in Christian history, calling readers away from worldly wisdom and theological pride into humble, Christ-centered living. Its relentless focus on self-denial, interior silence, and the love of God over knowledge has shaped the devotional lives of figures from Thomas More to John Wesley.

Celebration of Discipline – Richard Foster (1978) A landmark survey of twelve classical spiritual disciplines — inward (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), outward (simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and corporate (confession, worship, guidance, celebration) — presented as the path to spiritual freedom. Foster helped recover these ancient practices for a generation of evangelicals largely unfamiliar with the contemplative tradition.

Practicing the Presence of God – Brother Lawrence (~1692) A collection of letters and conversations from a 17th-century Carmelite lay brother whose simple but profound secret was finding God in every ordinary moment of work — particularly in his monastery kitchen. Brief enough to read in an afternoon, it has quietly transformed the prayer lives of countless readers across centuries.

The Way of the Heart – Henri Nouwen (1981) Drawing on the wisdom of the Desert Fathers — particularly the practices of solitude, silence, and unceasing prayer — Nouwen argues that these are not escapist luxuries but the essential foundation of any fruitful and compassionate ministry. A slim but penetrating book that rewards slow, repeated reading.

With Christ in the School of Prayer – Andrew Murray (1885) A classic devotional study of prayer built around Jesus's own teaching and example, covering thirty-one lessons on what it means to pray with faith, persistence, and alignment with God's will. Murray's tone is earnest and his theology robust, making this a deeply nourishing companion for anyone wanting to go deeper in their prayer life.

Humility – Andrew Murray (1895) A short but piercing examination of humility as the very foundation of the Christian life and the soil in which all other virtues grow. Murray argues that pride is the root of every spiritual failure and that true humility — modeled perfectly in Jesus — is not self-deprecation but a complete orientation of the self toward God and others.

Sacrament of the Present Moment – Jean-Pierre de Caussade (1741) A beautiful and liberating spiritual classic built around the idea of "abandonment to divine providence" — the practice of receiving each present moment, however ordinary or painful, as a direct gift and word from God. De Caussade writes with gentle but deep conviction that holiness is available to everyone, not just mystics, in the simple act of surrendering to what is.

Deep End of the Pool

The Spirit of the Disciplines – Dallas Willard (1988) A rigorous and philosophically serious argument that the body, its habits, and its training through spiritual disciplines are absolutely central to genuine Christlike transformation — not merely helpful additions. Willard challenges the "gospel of sin management" and makes the case that Jesus' way of life, not just his death, is the model for human flourishing.

The Spiritual Exercises – Ignatius of Loyola (1548) Not a book to be read so much as a program to be entered — a structured four-week retreat of meditations, prayers, and imaginative scripture engagements designed to order one's desires entirely toward God and discern his will with clarity. The foundation of Ignatian spirituality, it has shaped the interior lives of millions over five centuries and remains one of the most influential formation tools in Christian history.

The Story of a Soul – Thérèse of Lisieux (1898) The autobiography of a young French Carmelite nun whose "little way" of childlike trust, hidden love, and radical ordinariness became one of the most influential spiritual works of the modern era. Beneath its seemingly simple surface lies a profound theology of grace, suffering, and total surrender to God.

He and I – Gabrielle Bossis (1948) A remarkable and unusual spiritual journal in which a French laywoman records what she believed to be intimate conversations with Christ over the last decade of her life. Tender, personal, and surprisingly accessible, it occupies a unique place in Catholic mystical literature as a testimony to the possibility of deep, conversational union with God in ordinary life.

Wisdom of the Desert Fathers – Thomas Merton / Helen Waddell (1960/1936) Collected sayings (*apophthegmata*) of the 4th and 5th century desert monastics whose radical pursuit of God in the Egyptian and Syrian wilderness gave birth to the entire Christian contemplative tradition. Terse, paradoxical, and often disorienting, these short sayings are meant not merely to be read but to be sat with and wrestled through.

Fire Within – Thomas Dubay (1989) A scholarly yet surprisingly accessible study of the mystical theology of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, tracing the soul's full journey from beginning prayer through infused contemplation and into transforming union with God. Dubay takes the mystical tradition seriously as normative for all Christians, not just religious elites.

The Shattered Lantern – Ronald Rolheiser (1994) Diagnoses the three great modern obstacles to contemplative experience — narcissism, pragmatism, and unbridled restlessness — and charts a demanding but hopeful path back to genuine mystical awareness. Rolheiser argues that we have not lost God so much as we have lost the interior quiet needed to perceive him.

Pilgrim's Progress – John Bunyan (1678) The great allegorical epic of the Christian life, following "Christian" on his arduous journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City through trials, temptations, companions, and enemies that map the full terrain of spiritual struggle. Written in prison, it remains one of the most widely read books in the English language and rewards reading at every stage of faith.

Testament of Devotion – Thomas Kelly (1941) A luminous Quaker classic on living simultaneously in two realms — the busy outer world and the deep inner sanctuary of God's presence — written with rare spiritual urgency and poetic power. Kelly describes a life so rooted in "holy obedience" and the "Eternal Now" that it reads less like a how-to and more like a dispatch from someone who has actually been there.

Interior Castle – Teresa of Avila (1577) Teresa's masterwork, written at the command of her spiritual director, describes the soul as a crystal castle of seven concentric mansions, each representing a deeper stage of prayer, self-knowledge, and union with God. It remains one of the

most systematic and psychologically perceptive accounts of the contemplative journey ever written.

The Cloud of Unknowing – Anonymous (~14th century) A medieval English mystical text teaching that God cannot be known through intellect, concepts, or images — only through a naked, loving intent that pierces the "cloud of unknowing" between the soul and God. Demanding and counter-intuitive, it is the foundational text of the apophatic (or "negative") tradition in Western Christian mysticism.

Dark Night of the Soul – John of the Cross (~1578) The definitive mystical treatise on the painful but purifying process — the "dark night" of sense and spirit — by which God strips the soul of all consolation, attachment, and self-reliance in order to draw it into profound and unmediated union with himself. Misunderstood if read merely as a description of depression, it is actually a map of the most advanced stages of contemplative transformation.

PODCASTS

- **BEMA Discipleship Podcast**

Hosted by Marty Solomon, this podcast invites you to rediscover Scripture through a rich blend of Jewish context and Middle Eastern perspective. It brings the Bible to life in fresh ways, helping you see familiar passages with new depth, nuance, and meaning.

- **Practicing the Way - John Mark Comer**

In this collection of teachings from John Mark Comer and other trusted voices, you'll find clear, compelling guidance on spiritual formation and transformation. These messages are especially helpful for anyone longing to slow down, deepen their relationship with Jesus, and live with greater intentionality.

- **Bridgetown Church Audio Podcast**

From Bridgetown Church in Portland, this podcast offers thoughtful, spiritually rich teaching from a community deeply committed to helping people apprentice their lives to Jesus. If you're looking for teaching that is both grounded theologically and deeply practical for everyday life with God, this is a great place to start.

- **Gospel in Life Podcast - Timothy Keller**

Dive into the teaching archive of Timothy Keller, longtime pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Keller's messages are known for their clarity, depth, and relevance—bringing the gospel into the real questions and complexities of everyday life, especially in a modern, urban context.

- **Formation with John Ortberg**

Explore the intersection of spiritual formation, psychology, theology, and everyday life with John Ortberg. Through unhurried conversations with thoughtful leaders, scholars, and practitioners, Ortberg explores what shapes us, how we are transformed, and what it means to become more fully alive in God—bringing together the wisdom of the Christian

contemplative tradition with insights from psychology, neuroscience, leadership, and modern culture.

- **The BibleProject Podcast**

Go behind the scenes with Tim Mackie and Jon Collins as they explore the deeper layers of the biblical story. This podcast expands on the themes found in The Bible Project videos, offering rich theological insights and thoughtful conversations that help you see the beauty and coherence of Scripture.

APPS

- **The BibleProject (Videos & App)**

Explore the story of Scripture through beautifully crafted videos from The Bible Project. Since 2014, they've been helping people see the Bible as a unified, compelling story that leads to Jesus. Whether you're new to Scripture or have studied it for years, their videos make deep theological truths accessible, visual, and engaging—perfect for learning at your own pace or even a meaningful binge-watch.

- **Lectio 365 App**

Lectio 365 offers a peaceful, guided way to pray through Scripture each day. Rooted in the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, this app leads you through moments of stillness, reflection, and prayer—helping you listen to God's voice and carry His presence with you throughout your day. It's a beautiful rhythm for both starting and ending your day with intention.

- **The One Minute Pause App**

Created by John Eldredge and the team at Wild at Heart, this simple yet powerful app helps you slow down and reconnect with God in the middle of your day. Through short, guided pauses, you're gently invited to become aware of God's presence and engage with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—no matter how busy life feels.