

Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels

Patrick J. Hartin



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Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction xi

Chapter One

Context for Exploring Biblical Spirituality 1

Toward a Definition of Spirituality 2

Christian Spirituality 4

Biblical Spirituality 6

Appropriating the Spirituality of the Gospels within
the Context of Communities of Faith 8

Part One

**Exploring the Spiritual Vision of the Gospels:
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Chapters Two
through Five) 11**

Chapter Two

Exploring Matthew's Spiritual Vision 13

Encountering God in the Person of Jesus 14

The Road of the Past Leads to Jesus 14

Jesus Is "God with Us" 16

Jesus Reveals God as Father 18

Spiritual Response to Jesus as God's Presence with Us 18

Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:27) 19

Parable of the Judgment of the Nations (25:31-46) 26

Matthew's Spirituality Today 27

Chapter Three

Exploring Mark's Spiritual Vision 30

Encountering God in the Person of Jesus 31

*God's Action Provides the Framework
for Mark's Spirituality 31*

Spiritual Response to Jesus as Messiah, Son of God 33

*Spiritual Values Reflected in Jesus' Journey
to Jerusalem (8:22–10:52) 33*

Mark's Spirituality Today 41

Chapter Four

Exploring Luke's Spiritual Vision 44

Encountering the God of Salvation in the Person of Jesus 45

The Time of Fulfillment 46

John the Baptist Heralds This Time of Fulfillment 46

*The Time of Jesus Is the Fulfillment
of God's Gift of Salvation 47*

Spiritual Response to Jesus as Universal Savior 48

A Journey Spirituality 48

Luke's Spirituality Today 56

Chapter Five

Exploring John's Spiritual Vision 59

Encountering God as Father in Jesus, the Son 60

A Personal Spirituality 60

Community Dimension 61

Spiritual Response to Jesus as the Word Incarnate,
the Son of God 62

Spirituality of the Farewell Discourses 62

Spirituality of Personal Encounters with Jesus 67

John's Spirituality Today 70

Part Two

Biblical Spirituality: Incarnate and Alive 73

Chapter Six

Biblical Spirituality Incarnated 75

God's Transformative Presence with Us—

Matthew's Spirituality 75

St. Antony (250–356) 75

Dorothy Day (1897–1980) 77

Martyrdom—Mark's Spirituality 81

Sts. Perpetua and Felicity (died 203) 81

Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917–1980) 84

Embracing the Poor—Luke's Spirituality 87

St. Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226) 88

St. Damien of Molokai (1840–1889) 91

Grace, Contemplation, Love—John's Spirituality 93

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) 94

*Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta
of the Cross [1891–1942])* 98

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: The Spiritual Journey Continues 105

Endnotes 111

Bibliography 119

Index of Persons and Subjects 122

LESSON I

Introduction; Context for Exploring Biblical Spirituality

EXPLORING THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE GOSPELS, PAGES xi–xiii, 1–10

In this lesson, when necessary, reference will be made to specific pages of the commentary, *Exploring the Spirituality of the Gospels*. To connect what the author is saying in general with examples from Scripture, some questions invite you to read biblical passages not referenced by the commentary.

Day 1

1. What are your hopes and expectations as you begin studying the spirituality of the gospels?
2. As stated in the introduction (p. xi), how does the spiritual message of Christianity both “form” and “transform” believers?
3. What does the author say is the importance of the historical-critical method of Bible study to the Christian faith (p. xii)?

Day 2

4. Why will the exploration of the spiritual dimensions of the gospels found in this study go beyond the findings of the historical-critical method (p. xii)?
5. a) What are the two questions around which this study will proceed (pp. xii–xiii)?
b) How might you as a participant become personally involved by responding to these questions?
6. What are some ways that indicate spirituality is a topic that still captivates many modern people?

Day 3

7. How do the following passages illustrate what your commentary (p. 2) describes as the connection between spirit and life? (See Gen 2:7; John 3:6-8; 6:63; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23.)
8. a) What relationship do you see between spirituality and religion?
b) Why do you suppose it is so common today to separate spirituality from religious beliefs?
9. How does the author define spirituality (p. 4)?

Day 4

10. How does the image in Hebrews 12:1 help to illustrate the communal nature of Christian spirituality?
11. Scripture describes many different encounters with God. What impresses you most about one such event, Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 3:1-14?
12. Elijah does not encounter God in the way he expects (1 Kgs 19:1-16). In what unexpected ways have you encountered God or received special graces?

Day 5

13. a) What is the encounter with the divine that is written about in the prologue of 1 John (1:1-4)?
b) How does this compare with what the author of the commentary calls “the pulsating heart of Christian spirituality” (p. 4)?
14. What is the one constant found in each encounter with the divine mentioned in Hebrews 11:1-6?
15. Among those you have encountered in your own life, whose faith has witnessed to you of a real encounter with God?

Day 6

16. How is the definition of Christian spirituality found on page 6 illustrated by the conversion and ministry of the apostle Paul? (See Acts 9:1-22; Phil 3:5-14.)
17. If possible, in one sentence, state the essence of the spirituality of each gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) using the explanations found in pages 6–8 of the commentary introduction.
18. What challenge does the spiritual vision of the gospels present to modern believers such as yourself?

Introduction; Context for Exploring Biblical Spirituality

1. Answers will vary.
2. Hartin writes, “The spiritual message of Christianity . . . forms believers in the vision opened up by the writings of Scripture; it transforms by illuminating ways believers can be changed into the image of Christ.”
3. Understanding the foundations upon which the Christian faith is established can only be achieved by using the tools of the historical-critical method. This means, among other things, paying attention to the historical origins of biblical passages, their cultural setting, and the literary styles in which they were written.
4. This study will invite readers to discover “how the gospels relate the experience of the person of God in Jesus and how this experience transforms” those who read the gospels with faith.
5. a) “Who is Jesus?” and “What transformative response does the encounter with Jesus invite?”
b) Participants are invited to encounter Jesus as he is presented in each of the four gospels and then reflect on how such an encounter with Jesus could transform the life of the believer.
6. Many examples could be given, depending on personal experiences. One might notice the importance friends, family, and acquaintances place on finding meaning in their lives, the space dedicated to spiritual topics in bookstores, or an awareness of the modern debate over the relationship between spirituality and religion.
7. The first human became a living being when God’s breath (spirit) gave life to Adam (Gen 2:7). God’s life (grace) is communicated to us (our spirit), as evidenced in many of Paul’s greetings or farewells (Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23). God’s words communicate God’s Spirit; God’s words are spirit and life (John 3:6-8; 6:63).
8. a) Answers will vary. Many participants will likely see numerous connections between their faith and their spirituality.
b) Answers will vary.