

The  
Relentless  
Tenderness  
of Jesus

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## FOR REFLECTION

Begin with five minutes of silent prayer, becoming aware in faith of God's indwelling presence and humbly asking the Spirit to speak to your heart through Scripture, personal reflection and the insights of others.

Let one of the group read aloud 1 John 4:16–19. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. Describe the God you believed in during your childhood and teenage years.
2. Has anything changed in your perception of God, or are you still limping along with the understanding of God provided by your parents, pastors and your local faith community?
3. At this stage of the journey, are you too busy to spend time with God? Parents with small children surely qualify here. Have you lost the desire for holy loitering? Describe your prayer life.

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Let one of the group read aloud Philippians 3:7–11. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. One hundred years ago in the Deep South, the phrase “born again” was seldom used. Rather, the words used to describe the breakthrough into a personal relationship with Jesus were, “I was seized by the power of a great affection.” It was a deeply human and moving way to describe the initiative of God, the explosion within the human heart when Jesus became Lord of one's personal and professional life. It lent new meaning to the old Russian proverb, “Those who have the disease called Jesus will never be cured.” Share your own experience of the breakthrough.
2. If it has not happened as yet, do you remain confident that it will come to pass?
3. What has developed in your spiritual life since you were seized by the power of a great affection? Are you still clinging to that moment?

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Let one of the group read aloud 2 Corinthians 3:17. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. A Christian is always in the process of becoming one. Are you experiencing greater freedom from the bondage of human respect, people pleasing and craving the approval of others?
2. Are you taking advantage of a mentor, a guide or a spiritual director to lead you into greater freedom?
3. Share your response to the examination of conscience at the end of this chapter.

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Let one of the group read aloud Matthew 5:1–3. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. What does it mean to you to disappear into the tremendous poverty that is the adoration of God?
2. Are you able to receive the compassion of Jesus, be compassionate with yourself and pass it on to others? If not, why not?
3. What does Meister Eckhart mean when he says, "I pray that I may be quit of God that I may find God"?

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Let one of the group read aloud Mark 8:34–38. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

### JESUS AT EASTER

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1. Share the heartache, pain and suffering in your life, whether mental, emotional, physical or spiritual.
2. Have your failures, handicaps and personal grief made you more compassionate toward the failures and shortcomings of others? Give one illustration.
3. A recent national survey revealed that a mere 9 percent of Christians in America evaluated the morality of the war in Iraq in light of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The inscription on the bracelet, "What would Jesus do?" has virtually disappeared from Christian conversation. Does your identity in Christ influence your thinking about war? Is the principle of nonviolent resistance relevant in this era of terrorism? What are the alternatives?

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### JESUS AT EASTER

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Let one of the group read aloud Galatians 2:19–20. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. Describe someone you know well whom you consider transparent. What are his or her qualities that you find so attractive?
2. Do you see yourself as transparent? Illustrate by examples.
3. Ask others in the group what they most like about you.

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### LIVING OUT OF THE CENTER

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Let one of the group read aloud John 15:1–5. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. What degree of freedom have you attained from peer pressure and the expectations of others? Cite an example.
2. Share your experience of a time when a personal failure became a blessing.
3. Living out of the center calls us to be alert and attentive to the whisperings of the Spirit throughout the day. Classics like Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* and Richard Foster's *Prayer* have proved of inestimable help for countless disciples. Share what has helped you to remain aware of God's presence when the inevitable distractions of daily living pull you away. When you go to a movie, does Jesus stand outside on the sidewalk? When you step into a sailboat, does God stay ashore?

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### RECKLESS CONFIDENCE

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Let one of the group read aloud Luke 12:22–32. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. If you have internalized the mercy of Jesus, you are no longer plagued by unhealthy guilt, remorse and self-hatred. Share where you are and the measure of peace you have attained.
2. Share the psalm of thanksgiving you have written modeled on Psalm 103:1–5.
3. What, if any, are the traces of moralism/legalism remaining in your life?

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Let one of the group read aloud Matthew 11:25–27. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. Commenting on the three temptations by Satan in the desert, Henri Nouwen wrote: "The three temptations were three ways to seduce Jesus into becoming a competitor for love. The world of the tempter was precisely that world in which people compete for love through doing useful, sensational and powerful things and so winning medals that gain them affection and admiration."<sup>9</sup> Are you competing for love through acts of kindness and service, hoping to win affection and approval through your good deeds? In other words, are you doing the right thing for the wrong reason?
2. Is your mind giving to things the importance they have in reality?
3. Does the Jesus of your journey love you when you are good and reject you when you are bad?

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Let one of the group read aloud Philippians 3:7–14. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. With the numerous demands made on your time in December, are you able to maintain the priorities of God, family and work or ministry?
2. Comment on the short paragraph “Jesus Christ-mases in us . . .”
3. Have you expressed your sensitivity to the poor in the days preceding Christmas?

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Let one of the group read aloud Mark 6:1–6. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. In the commentary on the parable of the sower and the seed, at which level do you place yourself? If level four, are you at 30, 60 or 100 percent?
2. When life gets turbulent, when someone attributes to you motives that you do not have, when you experience loneliness, rejection by a friend, sudden unemployment or a bout of depression, are you able to maintain a quiet inner calm through the awareness that God loves you as you are and not how you should be?
3. Intensity of desire is of paramount importance in the life of prayer. Has your desire for intimacy with Jesus intensified since you were saved?

**F O R   R E F L E C T I O N**

Begin with five minutes of silent prayer, becoming aware in faith of God's indwelling presence and humbly asking the Spirit to speak to your heart through Scrip-ture, personal reflection and the insights of others.

Let one of the group read aloud Luke 11:1–13. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. Share with the group what was happening the last time you were struck by grace.
2. Do you experience difficulty in letting yourself be loved by God? Why?
3. If you have personally experienced Jesus Christ in your life, you qualify for the name tag “mystic,” because the classic definition of mystic is a person who has experienced God. Shortly before his death in 1985, Karl Rahner prophesied, “In the days ahead, the Christian will either be a mystic or no Christian at all.” Mystical experience is not a one-time thing. Do you agree or disagree with Rahner's statement? Are you comfortable with being called a mystic? Does your religious tradition use this term?

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Let one of the group read aloud 2 Corinthians 3:16 and Galatians 6:1. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. Recall and share a time when you acted counter-culturally, ignored conventional wisdom and disappointed purposely the expectations of family and friends. Were you scared? Why?
2. If your conscience urged you to take a position on abortion, homosexuality or another controversial moral issue contrary to the normative, evangelical teaching, what would you do?
3. How do you understand these words: "A free person is judgment against our own fear of freedom"? Why is there so much unfreedom in religious circles today?

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Let one of the group read aloud John 20:19–21. Then focus on the following questions for personal reflection and group interaction.

1. From your own experience have you found that you can be at peace even when you feel no peace?
2. Tell about your last experience of shipwreck and the feelings that accompanied it.
3. When was the last time you heard Jesus say, "It gives joy to My heart that you love Me. It delights Me." Close your eyes, pause a while, become still and listen. You have read *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus* and met together faithfully for these fourteen weeks with but one purpose in mind—to come to a more intimate, heartfelt understanding of Jesus as Lord, Savior, Brother and Friend. As you listen, can you hear Jesus saying these words to you now, "It gives joy to My heart to know that you love Me. It delights Me"?

Stand, join hands, pray the Lord's Prayer together and embrace one another with the sign of peace.

# Notes

## **Chapter 1 Healing Our Image of God and Ourselves**

1. James Burtschaell, *Philemon's Problem: The Daily Dilemma of the Christian* (Chicago: The ACTA Foundation, 1973), 21.
2. *Ibid.*, 20.
3. Dick Westley, *Redemptive Intimacy* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-third Publications, 1981), 136.

## **Chapter 2 The Day I Met Jesus**

1. Sean Caulfield, *The Experience of Praying* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980), 67.

## **Chapter 4 The Affluent Poor**

1. William E. Reiser, *Into the Needle's Eye—Becoming Poor and Hopeful under the Care of a Gracious God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Ave Maria Press, 1984), 53.
2. *Ibid.*, 55.
3. Carroll Stuhlmuller, *The Prophets and the Word of God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Press), 224.

## Chapter 5 Showdown in the Spirit

1. Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 30, 34.
2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 56.
3. Mary Craig, *Blessings* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 124.
4. *Ibid.*, 120.

## Chapter 6 The Transparent Disciple

1. Dorothy L. Sayers, quoted in *The Jesus Book*, comp. and ed. Michael E. McCauley (Chicago: Thomas More Publishing, 1978), 210.
2. Sebastian Moore, *The Inner Loneliness* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 85.

## Chapter 7 Living Out of the Center

1. Robert Gleason, *Christ and the Christian* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 18.
3. The substance of this reflection is drawn from Peter van Breeman's *Called by Name* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1980), 53.
4. Peter van Breeman, *Certain as the Dawn* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1980), 37.
5. Donald Gray, *Jesus, the Way to Freedom* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1979), 47.

## Chapter 9 Lion and Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus

1. Henri Nouwen, *Compassion, A Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday), 24.
2. *Ibid.*, 30.

3. Walter Burkhardt, *Tell the Next Generation* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1982), 80.

4. Nouwen, *Compassion*, 30.

5. Thomas Merton, quoted by Burkhardt, *Tell the Next Generation*, 192.

6. Laurens Van der Post, quoted in *Caring* by Morton Kelsey (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press), 96.

7. James Shannon, quoted by Burkhardt, *Tell the Next Generation*, 14.

8. Kelsey, *Caring*, 23–24.

9. Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 101.

## Chapter 10 The Great Season of Hope

1. van Breeman, *Certain as the Dawn*, 13.

## Chapter 11 The Crisis of Christmas

1. Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1978), 135–36.

2. William MacNamara, *Mystical Passion* (Chicago: Claratian Press, 1978), 58.

## Chapter 12 The Contemplative at Christmas

1. Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 161–62.

2. Burkhardt, *Tell the Next Generation*, 210.

3. Brennan Manning, *Souvenirs of Solitude* (Denville, N.J.: Dimension Books, 1979), 35–37. This section was previously published in a chapter entitled “Christmas Reflection at O’Hare.”

4. John Heagle, *A Contemporary Meditation on Hope* (Chicago: Thomas More Publishing, 1976), 18.

5. Bernard Haring, *A Sacramental Spirituality* (St. Louis, Mo.: Herder and Herder, 1972), 112.

### Chapter 13 Christmas Means Freedom

1. Anthony deMello, *The Song of the Bird* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982).
2. Gray, *Jesus, the Way to Freedom*, 46.
3. *Ibid.*, 49.
4. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 311.
5. John McKenzie, *Source* (Chicago: Thomas More Publishing, 1984), 206.
6. Heagle, *Contemporary Meditation*, 124.
7. Burkhardt, *Tell the Next Generation*, 114.
8. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 161.

### Chapter 14 The Shipwrecked at the Stable

1. José Ortega, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1957), 157.
2. Simon Tugwell, *The Beatitudes: Soundings in Christian Traditions* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1985), 127–28.
3. *Ibid.*, 6.
4. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 84.