



*Module Two*



## ***Module 2: Anchored in God***

Learning points

- The prayer that changed my life (and will change yours too!)
- Move from distrust to divine intimacy
- How to hear God speak, and what he says
- Five practical ways to pray anyone can do



### ***Video 1***

Learning points:

- How to discern perfectly
- How to allow God to work without limits
- The prayer that changed my life (and it'll change yours too)

### ***How to Discern Perfectly***

Welcome back! I'm thrilled you're here for Module 2. This module is all about prayer and relationship with God- the most important thing we can do in this life and for all Eternity. Let's start by reflecting on a text that's likely familiar to you. In Luke chapter one, Gabriel was sent by God to the Blessed Mother to invite her to become the mother of the Savior of the world. Mary asked a clarifying question: *"How can this be, since I have had no relations with a man?"* Then Gabriel explained, *"the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren;"* (and here's one of my all-time favorite verses in the Bible): *"for nothing will be impossible for God."*

And then, with no other questions or hesitation, Mary gave her famous fiat. She said yes without knowing how it was all going to work out. Without knowing how to tell Joseph or her family, she said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done unto me according to thy word."

An angel has never shown up before in my life asking me to become God's mother, but if he did, would I be ready to say yes without knowing every detail? Mary did. She's the only perfect person who ever lived besides Jesus. The moment when she acted in space and time came from a heart that was perfectly united with God outside of time. To put it in our terms from Module one, her tree had grown and flourished in trust of God, and the fruit was an immediate and unflinching yes.

Something worth noting in this scene is that in the very next sentence it reads, "Then the angel departed from her." Poof. Gone. Gabriel didn't tell her "here's how to make Joseph understand,"

or “You’re going to have to have the baby in a stable but don’t worry it’s going to turn out all right,” or “Herod is going to set out to murder your child but don’t worry- Joseph will get instructions so you can escape.” It’s important to note that even to the perfect person, God didn’t give the step-by-step itinerary of how it was going to go. He gave Mary what she needed *but not until the moment she needed it*. It’s also worth taking note that Mary didn’t ask for the step-by-step itinerary in advance because she trusted God so fully.

I ask myself, “what did Mary know that I don’t know? How could she say yes and live without knowing how everything would shape up?” It was because she knew God is her Father who would provide for her. In this module we’re going to work toward a stronger relationship with God- the eternal WHO that he wants us to become. And that starts with trust.

### ***Don’t Put God in a Box***

I’ll share a story from my own life about this that you may relate to. In 2013 I felt called to discern religious life and consider becoming a nun. I was terrified. I knew being on Broadway was no longer what I wanted, and I didn’t know what I wanted. Nevertheless, I was averse to the idea of becoming a nun. One of my reasons was because I thought I’d have to give up the things that gave me joy: Ballet, singing, acting, sculpting dolls (at the time I had a small business sculpting lifelike caricatures of people,) those were things that didn’t fit the life of a nun!

And yet, that nagging call didn’t go away. It was around this time that I began reading a book my mom gave me called *The Ear of the Heart* (trust me; I’d never have bought that book myself!) It was written by Mother Dolores Hart, a Benedictine cloistered nun who had been a movie star up until age 24. She was Elvis’s first on-screen kiss, she played leading roles on Broadway- she was a big, big deal. And yet she left her successful life and her handsome fiance to become a cloistered nun. In the midst of my terror about discernment, I wanted to go talk to her.

I drove up to Connecticut one day, to the Abbey of Regina Laudis where Mother Dolores lived. I somehow got an audience with her- I don’t know how!- for about 15 minutes. She still had the same beautiful blue eyes you see in her movies, and a deep peace about her. Our conversation helped calm some of the terror. She encouraged me not to do anything drastic- to be okay with enjoying my career and just keep listening. At the time I was dating a young man, and I felt no peace in the relationship. Mother Dolores told me, “*whoever he loves, it has to be you.*” Meaning that there’s no point in dating someone who loves the idea of me but not the actual me. It helped me understand that, whatever path God was calling me to, it would be the one my heart wanted. And she reassured me I could take my time.

At the end of our conversation Mother Dolores invited me to audition for the role of Annie in their summer theater run by the nuns! Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that cloistered Benedictine nuns would facilitate a summer theater! I realized that my assumptions about the lives of nuns needed to be expanded. After visiting with Mother Dolores, I took some time to walk around her Abbey and pray. The gift shop held cheese made by one of the nuns, and hand-drawn cards made by another. The nuns sang the psalms in beautiful unison. It was a far cry from the musical theater songs that I loved, but I began to understand that some of my gifts might be not only used, but glorified in the life of a nun.

The best part was finding the creche. As I mentioned, I sculpted 18-inch dolls, mostly replications of my Broadway tour castmates and at the time that business was very important to me. I kept seeing signs directing me to the creche so I decided to check it out. I stepped inside a dark building and when my eyes had had a minute to adjust, my jaw dropped. Laid out in front of me were 18-inch dolls from the 1700's, restored and cared for by the nuns. Dozens and dozens of dolls made up this creche and in the center was the Christ child with his mother and St. Joseph. There is a replica set in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Making dolls is an incredibly specific hobby, right? And yes, God sure showed me that day Gabriel's words: *"For nothing will be impossible for God."*

I was so scared of discerning religious life because I assumed that it wouldn't fit into my current idea of what I needed. Here's where my basic approach to my whole spiritual life was lacking: I was putting conditions on God. I was putting him in a box. This led to fear- my thought was, "what if I give God everything and he takes it away from me?" My basic approach was to cling to my desires rather than to hand them over to God and allow him to show me what he has for me.

Are you putting limits on God, or are you allowing him to work limitlessly in your life. The truth is that I hadn't let God have a space to fill in my heart. I'd been stuffing in all sorts of things because I was afraid of being empty. I kept chasing after what I wanted in that moment instead of stopping to allow him to show me. But to contradict that, here's today's North Star Quote of the Day: God only wants you to experience emptiness in order that he might fill you with himself. Until you're willing to be empty and receptive, you can't receive. Jesus himself is our model in this: Philippians 2:6-7 says, "Though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself."

To have an authentic relationship with God, you have to stand in the truth of who he is and who you are to him. You have to acknowledge, like the Blessed Mother, that you're the handmaid of the Lord. And if you know that he truly is limitless and that he can take care of all of the fears and doubts and impossible situations, then you can give your fiat like the Blessed Mother. Just as Mother Dolores told me, you don't have to take any drastic measures or changes. Just start by handing God your life. Write him the blank check and he will repay you in ways you could never imagine.

### ***Surrender***

Easier said than done, right? I struggle with writing God a blank check. So today we're going to take a practical step to identify the areas where we struggle and learn to hand them over by praying the transformative surrender prayer.

In the midst of my terror over handing God my life, I went to confession and confessed that I didn't trust God enough with my vocation. The young priest was mostly quiet, but he gave me the Surrender prayer that you'll find on today's worksheet. He advised me to pray the surrender prayer slowly every day, and to put each part of myself into God's hands. The prayer reads like a litany: "I give you my heart, my memory, my imagination, my desires, my weaknesses, my sins..."

If you're a visual learner like I am, imagine God's hands outstretched toward you. Really see them there. Then put each part of yourself slowly and intentionally into his hands as you say the words. What I notice when I pray it is that, on any given day, it's feasible and even easy to hand over 80% of myself. But there are three, four, or five things that I want to hold on to. The truth is that God deserves them all.

Pray the prayer slowly and then write down beneath what were the areas you wanted to keep to yourself. The areas where you experienced your gut clenching and saying, "no, not that!" Those are the areas you MOST need to hand over. Tomorrow we're going to dive into the good stuff of what happens when you surrender yourself fully. If you're like me, this surrender prayer is going to be super tough especially the first time, but I promise you it's one thousand percent worth it.



## *Video 2*

Learning points:

- Banish the fear that God's will is misery
- Move from distrust to intimacy in prayer
- How to approach God with confidence
- How to hear God speak

### *Is God's Will Misery?*

In my years of growing up Catholic, I knew in concept that God was goodness and beauty and truth himself. But that knowledge didn't cross over into a deeper understanding of his heart. I thought that, when I surrendered to him, his will would consist mostly of me suffering- and from hearing from hundreds of young people around the world, I know that that's a very common fear. I thought that when I surrendered to him, he would take everything I loved away and my life would be miserable. Therefore, for many years, my prayer life looked like this, "Dear God, I want this and this and this. If you don't really want me to do it please send a lightning bolt or something; otherwise, I'm just going to do what I want. Okay thanks bye." Obviously not authentic prayer. I was trying to hide a part of myself, to keep my desires to myself where I could control them.

As my faith has matured and I've invested more in it, I've been shown that God's intentions are to take care of me, to nourish me, to give me the deep desires of my heart. My image of God as a God of punishment fell far, far short of reality. That needed to be healed in order for me to discern properly. I'm excited to dive into the topic of divine intimacy with you today.

### *Divine Intimacy*

So, how did the prayer of surrender go for you yesterday? When I was discerning religious life, I prayed that prayer every day and many ugly cries in the chapel ensued. I was facing the terror of letting God see and have all of me, and it was terrifying at first.

A beautiful breakthrough moment transformed my fear and helped me understand what divine intimacy means. During the filming of my reality TV show *The Sisterhood: Becoming Nuns*, we did a holy hour and attended mass every morning without cameras. During that time, the Lord was able to work in my heart in new ways. One morning, I prayed my prayer of surrender as usual and felt the usual fear. But I persisted and I finished it. After receiving communion in mass, I was given a vision of Jesus holding out his heart to me. The look in Jesus's eyes was one of perfect compassion, love, and desire. He was holding out his heart to me and asking me to take it. It hit me in a new way that I was being offered the most perfect, pure, loving, limitless heart in the Universe. He was offering me so much more than he was asking me to surrender.

I took his heart in my hand and said "Thank you. What should I do with it?" and Jesus said, "Take yours out and put mine where yours used to be." In this prayer experience it was as if I could

open a small door in my chest, which I did. I took out my heart which was shriveled and gray and stony and pathetic in comparison to his, and I put his heart where mine used to be. I experienced a perfect peace and an overwhelming sense that he *only* wants to take care of me and to know his love for me.

So, I'm there holding my heart in my hand, and I ask him, "What should I do with this?" And he asked, "May I have it please?" I was struck by his gentle kindness and by how he gave me the option. He created me; he could have demanded my heart from me! But he respects my free will and he doesn't demand; he invites.

I knew that the heart I had to offer him was so poor in comparison to his, but I also knew that my heart was what he most wanted. I handed it to him (a bit reluctantly) and he put my heart where his used to be. This is echoed in Psalm 51:12: "*A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit.*"

And ever since then I know Christ differently. And here's what I know about his heart that I want to share with you: Christ wants you to belong to him, and for him to belong to you. He wants to give you his heart, and he won't withdraw from no matter how often you sin. He wants to be intimately involved in everything you do. His love isn't conditional. He wants to see you in your entirety, and he welcomes everything you are. He wants you to call him your home.

### ***God's Will for You is Only Good***

The beautiful gift of Christ's heart allowed me to make my false fears walk the plank: In that experience of receiving his heart, I let go of the belief that God's will is pure misery. The fear that when I offer my whole self to the Lord, he'd take away everything I love. Let's replace that fear with today's North Star Quote: Your heart's deepest desires *are also God's desires for you*. God created you and designed you the way you are not to frustrate you, but to fulfill you. There's no division. He starts by giving you himself, which is the ultimate answer to our heart's longings. And as long as it's not sinful, you are absolutely free to choose the vocation or other path that you like the best! His will isn't to doom you to a life you hate. I've encountered so many people who are scared they're "supposed" to go to the convent or monastery but hate the idea of it. My advice is to go visit with an open mind and find out. Don't be afraid because if you hate it, you're not called there. It's really that simple. The other nuns or monks won't want you either if you're miserable because they'll have to live with you! Same thing with the person you're called to marry- God wants you to marry someone you're attracted to and in love with who you find it natural to be around. You don't need to overthink it.

Suffering will find you in any path- don't worry, you'll have ample opportunities to offer up suffering no matter what! Because this isn't Heaven, you also won't find perfect happiness here on Earth no matter how wonderful the person you marry, convent you join, or job you work at. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "A certain participation of Happiness can be had in this life: but perfect and true Happiness cannot be had in this life." (Summa Theologica I, II, q5, a3).

But in talking to many, many vocation directors and in over forty conversations about discernment on the Called and Caffeinated Podcast, I've heard this echoed by every author, teacher, and speaker: God created you to do what you love to do, and he wants you to have his heart, the very best part of himself.

This divine intimacy is echoed in the writings of St. Faustina who experienced many visions of Jesus in her life. Jesus said, *"Tell aching mankind to snuggle close to My merciful Heart, and I will fill it -with peace. Tell [all people], My daughter, that I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself, but radiates them to other souls."* (p. 1074) The word "snuggle" sounds almost too familiar, right? It nearly makes me uncomfortable, but Jesus truly does want to be that close to you. When you walk down the aisle to receive him in communion, he is waiting for you and longing for you and looking at you the way that a groom looks at his bride. This is because your Eternal WHO, your identity, is Jesus's beloved and God the Father's child.

We are designed for intimacy. One of my podcast guests, Deacon Gerard Anthony, called it *"Into Me See."* Being seen, known, and accepted by God, and trusting him in return, is the starting point for all right discernment. It's easy to see why trust is key in discernment. Think about a time when you had to work something out with a person you didn't fully trust. Maybe you felt betrayed, or you felt they were not honest, or you suspected that they were selfish. That interaction is bound to be tense. There's bound to be a struggle for power, a desire to get out of there as soon as possible.

This is why it's important to examine how you see God and to seek out that intimacy in prayer so you can trust him. Think about a time you worked out an issue with someone you trust. There's a starting point of security. Even if the issue is high stakes, you go into it listening and receptivity. That's what we're striving for. God is your partner, not your enemy, in discovering your vocation and in every future choice you make.

### ***Building Trust in Prayer***

Here's a little story that illustrates how to approach God our good father in prayer. When we were out on a walk, my two-year-old daughter came up to me with two flowers in her hand that she'd picked from the roadside. One was almost totally torn up, and both would be wilting soon. Without judging her gift, she walked up to me with a sweet smile and said, "for you, mommy!" She put her crumpled offering in my hand. Then she said with confidence, "hold my hand." I of course took her hand and we walked the rest of the path together.

My heart melted. I couldn't imagine a better gift in the world than those torn-up flowers she gave me. And she asked for my hand with perfect confidence that I'd give it to her. She knew and trusted that I'd take care of her.

It's easy to judge yourself for not praying "long enough," or saying the so-called "right" words, or praying the "wrong" devotions. You can also easily begin to believe that your prayer will only be heard if you do it "perfectly." The truth is that prayer is nothing more than a conversation with

your good father and Jesus your beloved. Just as I'm thrilled by my daughter's gift, God is thrilled by the gift of your prayer, no matter what you say. You should pay attention and devote adequate time, sure, but you don't need to judge your gift of prayer. It will be perfect to God because he's our Father who's obsessed with you, his child. As I was stressing out about what to say in prayer once, a nun named Sr. Beth Anne Dillon told me, "*You don't have to 'pray.' Just sit and let Jesus love your heart.*"

You can also approach God as my daughter did to me: with confidence that she was taken care of. She asked for my hand with the knowledge and trust that I'd give it to her. Any good parent will move the earth to meet their children's needs. Jeremiah 29:12-14 says, "When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you. When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me—oracle of the LORD—and I will change your lot." That's a strong promise.

### ***Hearing God Speak***

One of the most common questions I get is, "How do I hear God speak to me?" My honest answer? "I don't know!"

Hearing God in prayer is highly personal. God knows how to reach you, but I can't spell out for you how he will reach you or how his voice will sound to you. Did you ever see the old movie *The Ten Commandments* starring Charlton Heston? I find that many people expect to hear God's voice as a booming British male voice in their heads. And the expectation is that he'll sound somewhat like David Attenborough. Maybe he will sound that way to you; I don't know. From my thousands of conversations about discernment, however, people tell me that their expectation of that British man's voice almost never happens. God speaks in other ways to most of us.

In my own prayer life, I've developed over time an awareness of hearing words, but not as a voice in my head. It's more an understanding that comes to me and is accompanied by a feeling of peace. But also, you can't limit God to just words in your head. When I've asked for guidance, I've received communication from God that take all sorts of forms. Here's an example: Recently I received a package in the mail I hadn't even ordered, with a Sacred Heart necklace and the litany of humility prayer, on a day that I specifically asked for guidance. The Sacred Heart necklace was a reminder of his love for me, and the litany of humility was a gentle invitation to stop worrying and let him work a situation out for me.

There are infinite ways God can and will reach you if you are attuned to looking for him. The basic principle is this: Give God space and daily prayer time and he *will* speak to you. He wants to. With all that being said, there are ways to discern the voice of God from, say, the voice of temptation or the voice of self-criticism. When God speaks, he never uses these tones:

- Guilt
- Blame
- Hatred

- Shame
- Criticism
- Dismissiveness
- Competitiveness

Rather, his voice is always loving. He speaks in these tones:

- Tenderness
- Challenge
- Invitation
- Gentleness
- Compassion
- Hope
- Empathy
- Affirmation

In today's worksheet, you'll pray the prayer of surrender again and use journal prompts to reflect on your understanding of how hearing God's voice and surrendering to his will have changed for you. Enjoy, and I'll see you back for the next video.



## *Video 3*

Learning Points:

- What God has promised
- How to love reading scripture, even if you've tried and given up before
- Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

### ***Developing Divine Intimacy***

I've shared my testimony of receiving Jesus's heart, so now for the rest of this module let's get practical for you. Let's put all this background work into action. Everyone prays differently, so in the next two videos I'll lay out several ways to pray that will allow you to hear God speak to you. I recommend that you try them all, but it's definitely fine to pick favorites. We'll start today with reading scripture and praying the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours.

### ***How to Love Reading Scripture***

A scripture scholar Joshua Mazrin was a podcast guest of mine on Called and Caffeinated. He encouraged me to read the Bible as a book of promises. Perhaps you've heard it said that the Bible is God's love letter to us. In it is contained all the infidelity, the filth, the drama, the sin of humanity, and God's response of faithfulness, justice and love.

Growing up as a cradle Catholic I heard the Bible at mass but I didn't read the Bible in my own time much. I didn't memorize scripture and didn't understand the power of strengthening my faith through scripture. A few years back I began reading scripture daily. I began to discover and uncover God's promises contained in his living word.

Remember back in module one how we need to focus on WHO rather than WHAT? God's more concerned with WHO than with WHAT. God promises us *himself* in scripture. He provides for and protects and pulls his people the Israelites through many a sticky situation. He works out their temporal needs spectacularly. But it strikes me how even more strongly he promises his presence, his very self. He promises belonging in his family.

Here are a few of my favorite promises God makes:

- *"I will never leave you or forsake you." Heb 13:5*
- *"You will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Ps 27:13*
- *"In this world you will have trouble. But take courage! I have overcome the world." John 16:33*
- *"The Lord is our light, salvation and our refuge. There is nothing we need fear." Ps 27:1*
- *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans you prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jer 29:11*
- *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." Ex 14:14*
- *"I am with you always, even until the end of time." Mt 28:20*

- *“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands!” (Is 49:6)*
- *“For you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you” (Is 43:4)*
- *“For the mountains may depart, and the hills be shaken, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be shaken” (Is 54:10)*

God is inviting you to seek him and to fall in love with him first. He prioritized you above all else when he died for you. And he invites you into that kind of relationship with him.

To love reading God’s love letter to you, I recommend a simple method for reading the Bible. If you’ve tried to read the Bible cover to cover and give up in the details of wearing tassels in Leviticus, you’re not alone! I have a simple formula so that it never becomes too dry. This of course is in addition to receiving the Eucharist at mass, making Holy hours, meditation, and reading writings of the Saints.

### ***Method***

1. Starting from the beginning, read two chapters of the Old Testament, one Psalm, and one chapter of the New Testament per day. That’s four chapters per day. I keep three bookmarks in my Bible so I don’t have to search each day for each place where I left off.
2. Before I read, I invite the Holy Spirit to essentially be my reading buddy- to inspire me with whatever passage he wants to speak to me through. Then as I read, I pay attention to whatever pops out at me. Sometimes a line inspires me, or strikes me as a little bit odd, or I realize I don’t understand it. So, I pay attention to it and ask for understanding. I spend fifteen minutes or so just entering into what I just read and digesting it. Often it pops into my head throughout the day.
3. I recommend starting off your day first thing in the morning by reading scripture and praying for 15-20 minutes. You can also do it midday or at the end of the day- but do it.
4. I also recommend keeping a journal. Research shows we remember things better when we write them down. I’ve kept a journal for years now, and it’s amazing to go back and see how God has fulfilled the promises he has made to me.

The beautiful part about paying attention to God’s word is that it begins to grow in your heart. When you take it a few chapters at a time and meditate on them, you’ll find that it stays with you. You get to participate in making the Word flesh, just as Mary did, because it begins to manifest in your actions. And your heart begins to be anchored and rooted in God. It only takes a little time each day. Investing in your prayer life and your habits are within your circle of control. Consistently give God space to speak into your life and he will.

### ***Liturgy of the Hours***

Another fantastic way to begin to hear God’s voice is praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office. It’s the universal prayer of the church. Around the world, people in religious life, priests, and lay people are praying at all hours of the day. The Divine Office has been prayed even before the time of Christ; Psalm 118 reads *“seven times a day I praise you O Lord.”* The prayers comprise the 150 Psalms that are poetic and beautifully evocative, as well as hymns and other scripture

readings. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states in Paragraph 2596, “The Psalms constitute the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament. They present two inseparable qualities: the personal, and the communal. They extend to all dimensions of history, recalling God's promises already fulfilled and looking for the coming of the Messiah.” The most common ones are morning prayer or Lauds, midday prayer or Sext, evening prayer or Vespers, and nighttime prayer, or Compline.

iBreviary is a free app that I love to pray with so you don't have to carry a breviary or learn how to use it- it can be quite complicated! However, if you want to, feel free to go all in and buy yourself a breviary. Rock with whatever floats your boat.

We've covered a ton of ground, and now it's time to put it into practice. Read at least one of the chapters of the Bible from your worksheet slowly. Take it very personally. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire in you whatever he wants you to learn and know. Then spend fifteen minutes or so journaling and chewing on the words you just read. Give him space to speak. You can declare God's help and presence and sovereignty into the situation you are deciding on in this course.

If you have time, you can check out the Liturgy of the Hours today by downloading the iBreviary app. You can do it any time- it doesn't have to be today- but if you're going to do it another time, I suggest you write it in your calendar or set it as an event in your phone so you actually do it. Enjoy, and I'll see you for the next video.



## *Video 4*

Learning points:

- St. Ignatius's method for having a conversation with God
- Three practical prayer methods you can do right now
- Optimizing your prayer time

### ***More Prayer Methods***

Welcome back for the final video in Module two! Today, we're diving deeper into building a strong prayer life. Remember, there is a lot that's not in your control, but your prayer habits are in your control. As you use these tools that give God space to speak, you *will* begin to hear his voice.

You'll learn several different methods to pray. Likely, you won't use all of them every day. Whichever tools become your favorite, or even if you have a different one that we don't cover here, make sure you set aside at least fifteen minutes a day to pray and invite God to speak to your heart. Fourteen minutes and twenty-four seconds is *just one percent* of your day! Let's round that up to fifteen minutes. Everyone can spare one percent of his or her day for the sake of salvation.

### ***Pray like St. Ignatius***

First let's head back to the 1500's for a Saint whose prayer method has stood the test of time. St. Ignatius of Loyola is the go-to saint when it comes to discernment. He wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* in which are contained guided meditations on the life of Christ. The *Exercises* are aptly named: Ignatius compares them to an athlete training for a race. The exercises strengthen your inner life with God and help you learn to hear his voice. Essentially, they're a spiritual workout. You can get a copy of the Exercises or even find them online, and I do recommend using and adapting them to fuel your prayer life. Make sure you also do the Exercises with a Spiritual director- we'll talk more about that in a little bit. What I find amazing is that Ignatius encourages you to engage all five of your senses, as well as your imagination, in meditation. He's relatable, and actionable. Not what you'd expect from a clergyman in the Renaissance era!

Here's how to meditate like St. Ignatius: Begin by envisioning the location. He wrote "*Seeing the place...in a visible contemplation... See with the sight of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is found which I want to contemplate. I say the corporeal place, as for instance, a Temple or Mountain where Jesus Christ or Our Lady is found, according to what I want to contemplate.*" Basically, see the scene in your imagination.

Then you go on to experience the scene with your five senses. In his exercise in which you meditate on Christ's crucifixion, you imagine what it would have been like to smell the smells on Calvary. Then you imagine the sounds you would have heard- the hammer clanging on the nails, the creak of the wood of the cross, the cries of the crucified men. You imagine what you would

have seen as you stood on Calvary, and you create the scene in your mind. You imagine the taste of the bitter vinegar and the sensations of breathing in the air.

After experiencing and entering fully into the meditation, each exercise ends with a “colloquy”. What is that? It’s a fancy word for conversation. After entering fully into Calvary with Christ, you simply tell him what’s on your heart. You give him the thanksgiving that will naturally arise from seeing his suffering for your sake. You offer yourself to him in return, seeing the depth of his love for you. Nothing is forced or fake. It’s a way of inspiring authentic devotion in your heart.

This is an extraordinary way to pray. Sometimes it’s easy to forget you’re talking to a person. This is an excellent way to allow what may appear to be a dry, academic text to come to life.

In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius includes his own surrender prayer that perfectly complements our other surrender prayer: *“Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will -- all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it! All is Thine, dispose of it according to all Thy will. Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.”*

### ***Inviting Jesus Into Your Day***

Does the idea of inviting Jesus into your day sound simplistic? It is, but it’s transformative. When you discern marriage with a person, you spend time with them, do ordinary things with them, and talk with them. When you just give Jesus your time, you’re loving him rightly, meaning that you’re loving him for his own sake. The more time you spend with God the better you’ll know him and his will. And it’s important not to separate your “church self” from your “real self.” They’re both the same person, and inviting Jesus into all those daily, ordinary moments is one of the best ways to sanctify them and build trust.

When I was single and longing to find my vocation, I started responding to that loneliness by going on “dates” with Jesus. The loneliness was an invitation to spend time with him and allow him to fill me. It outwardly wouldn’t change much, but it transformed ordinary days into quality time. On a night when I was alone, I might cook myself a special dinner and watch a movie and just invite the Lord into that. Just send him little loving prayers and thoughts and be on the lookout for his love notes to me. Or I’d go for a walk in the park and invite him along. I encourage you to try it! He has surprises in store for you when you invite him in.

### ***Holy Hour***

One of my favorite ways to pray is to make a holy hour or a holy half hour. If you’ve never done one before and are intimidated, don’t be! You can do Ignatian meditation, journaling, reading the Bible, praying the liturgy of the hours- basically any of the prayer methods we’ve already covered. I just think of them being super-charged when you do them in Jesus’s presence.

### ***Getting the Most Out of Prayer Time***

Deep work requires deep prayer and concentration so put your phone away always for prayer. Distractions keep you from finding your true self. Even when you're not praying, try to limit the number of times you check your phone.

This is because notifications send a shot of dopamine to the brain. When you're checking your phone constantly it'll keep you on the surface and unable to get to the place of contemplation. It's good and necessary to allow your brain breaks from constant stimulation. When you check social media, you're finding out how people rank ahead or behind you in popularity. Give yourself lots of breaks from that pressure!

C. S. Lewis has this excellent quote on distraction: *"We are always falling in love or quarreling, looking for jobs or fearing to lose them, getting ill and recovering, following public affairs. If we let ourselves, we shall always be waiting for some distraction or other to end before we can really get down to our work. The only people who achieve much are those who want knowledge so badly that they seek it while the conditions are still unfavorable. Favorable conditions never come."* And yes, that's today's North Star Quote.

### ***Spiritual Direction***

As a side note, I encourage you to seek out a spiritual director if you haven't already while you discern your life choices. I know it can be very hard to find one, and it's a process. God works in special ways through spiritual directors beyond the scope of this course.

If you don't have a spiritual director, I encourage you to ask your parish priests or another priest you know. If they are too busy, ask them for recommendations. If they don't have any, look up local monasteries or convents and contact them to see if there are brothers, sisters or priests who could direct you. Sometimes also priests whom you know but who live in a different location will agree to direct you over Skype. If all else fails, send an honest plea to the Holy Spirit: "you know what I need. Please bring me what I need." You can bet your bottom dollar he'll do exactly that.

### ***Review***

You made it to the end of Module 2! Congratulations! We covered a ton in this module.

- In video 1, we covered the importance of surrender as well as the prayer of surrender. We discussed the necessity for being open to God's plan and of receptivity.
- In video 2, I shared my testimony of receiving Jesus's heart and how he wants to be intimate with each of us. We discussed God's response to our surrender- his overwhelming and provident love.
- In video 3, we learned a simple method for reading the Bible and praying the liturgy of the hours. We discussed how to seek out God's promises in scripture and how to hear him speak through them.
- And in video 4, we worked on St. Ignatius's spiritual exercises and how they involve our whole selves, leading to an authentic conversation with God. We discussed simply "dating Jesus:" inviting him into our everyday actions and turning them into quality time

with him. We discussed the Holy Hour touched on the importance of eliminating distractions in prayer and of limiting phone time.

Enjoy your worksheet today, and I'll see you back soon for Module three.