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## Pensees, Blaise Pascal

Douglas Brown

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## Book Reviews



### **Marriage Spirituality: Ten Disciplines for Couples who Love God**, by Paul Stevens, IVP, 1989.

*Marriage Spirituality* is a practical and helpful resource for calling Christian couples back to the basics in their relationship with each other and their God. Stevens, author of *Married for Good* and *Liberating the Laity*, wrote the book based on insights and experiences gained while teaching a course at Regent College on building strong marriages in the local church.

Stevens' foundational premise is expressed early in the text: "Instead of looking for God in the obviously sacred, I am inviting you to seek Him at home." He identifies specific barriers to spiritual friendship in marriage, such as too many agendas, over familiarity, a history of mutual sin and forgiveness, unresolved problems, and fear of intimacy. Then he illustrates how each of these roadblocks to developing spirituality in marriage confirm the wisdom of choosing spouses who are or can become our spiritual friends.

Defining marriage spirituality as "simply being intentional about the development of our relation-

ship with God through Christ as a response to his grace throughout our lives," the author develops ten ways of breaking down the barriers. The shared disciplines include: prayer; guided conversation; Sabbath keeping (the discipline of worship and play); a retreat for shared solitude; study; service; sexual fasting (the only specific marital discipline mentioned in the New Testament); obedience; confession; and mutual submission.

One of the chapters I particularly enjoyed dealt with the topic of obedience. Stevens tackles some issues he calls "guidance myths for couples." Some of the myths he addresses include: 1) God has a wonderful plan for your life together (God has something better than a plan; he has a purpose); 2) God's will is normally associated with "open doors"; and 3) When you make a mistake, you have to go back and start again, if you can. In this chapter, he shares an interesting principle born out of two decades of spiritual companionship with his wife: "If it is not God's will for both of us, it is probably not God's will, no matter how much one spouse believes he or she has God's guidance." The author asserts that Christ leads married people as couples, not merely as individual husbands and wives. The discipline of obe-

dience is a spiritual process for partners.

Each chapter concludes with an opportunity to put the discipline discussed into practice. This brief section lends itself easily to meaningful interaction and implementation as a couple at home, in a small group setting over several weeks, or as a marriage enrichment guide on a weekend retreat.

While *Marriage Spirituality* is not lengthy nor difficult to comprehend, it is challenging. The challenge is for Christian couples to grow together in the Lord. The ten spiritual disciplines presented in this book can go a long way in deepening a couple's commitment to each other and in developing the dimension of sharing together what is most important in life.

**Dennis Lynn  
York, Nebraska**

**Prayer: Finding The Hearts True Home,**  
By, Richard J. Foster, Harper Collins, 1992.

Once in a while a book is written that is life changing. You find yourself returning to it repeatedly, highlighting something different each time. Craddock's *Overhearing the Gospel* is one of those books for me, and now Richard J. Foster's *Prayer* has joined it in the "best of" section of my library. Through its pages, Foster opens the door to prayer much wider than any other author I have read.

Foster has not written an exegesis on prayer texts or provided a "how to" formula. This book will not tell you about prayer; rather, its these pages will lead you into the presence of God. This book is about experiencing prayer, cultivating intimacy, finding God in every moment and emotion. This is expressed by the sub-title, *Finding the Hearts True Home*.

The greatest thing Foster brings is not his eloquent writing style, but a sense of the reality of God. Do not charge through the reading to complete another book; instead let the words and thoughts amplify the stirring of your soul. You will find it creates times of silence and celebration as you read it.

Foster characterizes prayer by directional movement and human need:

Moving Inward: Seeking The Transformation  
We Need

Moving Upward: Seeking The Intimacy We Need  
Moving Outward: Seeking the Ministry We Need

Under each major heading Foster includes seven chapters. Each chapter represents one of the many facets of prayer for the reader to explore. While reading these sections, the heart is stirred by the Spirit, intimacy blossoms, and prayers of others are heard. The writer describes prayer in its many shades and nuances—prayer of tears, silence, and simplicity. Even the troubled prayers of the forsaken are included, as well as praise, a few words of unceasing prayer, and some challenging calls to radical prayer.

To be honest, reading a book that purports something so life changing as greater intimacy with God is a bit intimidating. This concern is the first thing Foster addresses, "We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it. We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do, but it seems like a chasm stands between us and actually praying. We experience the agony of prayerlessness. We are not sure what holds us back."

As Foster deals with our human dilemma about prayer he brings our struggle to a sense of peace. "Our problem is that we assume prayer is something to master the way we master algebra or auto mechanics. That puts us in the 'on-top' position, where we are calmly and deliberately surrender control and become incompetent."

What an expression of the reality of the heart struggle! When I finished Foster's first chapter I heard him praying just what my heart was saying.

*"Dear Jesus, how desperately I need to learn to pray. And yet when I am honest, I know that I often do not even want to pray.*

I am distracted!  
I am stubborn!  
I am self-centered!

*In your mercy, Jesus bring my 'want-er' more in line with my 'need-er' so that I can come to want what I need.*

*In your name and for your sake, I pray. —Amen."*

**Brad Dudley  
Santa Monica, CA**

**Celebration of Discipline**, by, Richard Foster, Harper Collins, 1985.

When you hear the word “discipline,” what comes to your mind? It may conjure thought of strictness, regimentation, or even control. In this book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster brings refreshing, uplifting, and insightful meaning to “discipline” in a spiritual framework. He calls the reader to move beyond surface living, thinking of discipline in negative terms, into the depths. He explains “that the disciplines are not only for ‘spiritual giants’ but for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns.”

The book is divided into three sections. The first section speaks to the disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. Foster challenges the reader to look inward and make inner transformation a goal for one’s life. He maintains that the change can come when one allows God to do the work.

The second section speaks of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. Here one sees the manifestation of the inward disciplines reflected in outward behavior. Foster explains how these disciplines are shown in one’s attitude toward material possessions, in inner peace, denial of self, and looking for ways to serve others.

In the third section Foster speaks of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Here he presents the meaning of discipline in the corporate settings.

Throughout this book, Foster combines his own original thoughts with biblical writers to present meaningful insights. His use of scriptures keeps the focus always on the spiritual.

A word needs to be mentioned about one of the foremost assets of this book and that is its practicality, for we all live in the real world.

Written in a clear, forthright manner, the call of Foster appears to be this—move out into the deep and experience more spiritual discipline and you, too, will celebrate the disciplined life and be blessed because of it.

**Barbara Meador**  
Dallas, Texas

**A Center of Quiet**, by David Runcorn, IVP, 1990.

I have read a number of books (mostly by Nouwen)

that address the spiritual necessities of solitude, silence, and prayer. Each time I pick one up I consider what I have read on these topics and wonder if another book written by another priest will speak to a normal guy like myself. In *A Center of Quiet* by David Runcorn, I found a user-friendly look at these basics of spiritual growth and development.

Different from many of us who escape the speed of our day-to-day existence to finish important assignments, Runcorn spent the summer of 1987 as a hermit in a small cabin in Switzerland with his only agenda being developing a more complete space for God in his life. He was not there to write this book.

This short collection of experiences on solitude, silence, and prayer is a powerful outgrowth of three months of personal, quiet, and secluded time before God. Runcorn states, “This is a book of ... marker posts... not a blueprint... a companion for fellow travelers.” This attitude of not having reached perfection in these three disciplines spoke volumes to me, one who attempts the disciplines over and over again with only minor glimpses of completion.

*A Center of Quiet* is divided into three sections which address the disciplines of solitude, silence, and prayer. In part one, “The Call to Solitude,” Runcorn focuses on the importance of solitude. If no other reason were necessary, he shows how often and how important solitude was to Jesus Christ. Runcorn looks at times of solitude for Jesus as punctuation marks to ministry. The power of Christ’s ministry, so it seems, was born out of many hours of waiting and listening for God’s guidance. This is definitely where our ministries should initiate.

The second portion of this book deals with the importance of silence. It seems that the purpose of silence is now seen as much for punishment as for seeking the Father. Runcorn says about this phenomenon with silence: “We threaten our children with it unless they behave. We impose it socially on people who offend or upset us. Solitary confinement... has been used as effective torture.” Silence is vital to anyone who longs after the Father of Life because periods of silence are the only times when we stop talking long enough to listen.

Lastly, the discipline of prayer is discussed as it relates to our wordiness. He also looks at the importance of intercessory prayer where we learn to pray from the heart and not from the lips. Runcorn also discusses how we often use our prayers to instruct God on what he ought to be doing or to tell him about things he already knows.

One of the more powerful aspects of this text occurs as Runcorn challenges our view of where God is and what he is capable of doing. He states, “We look for God in beauty but not in ugliness... God is not

closer to us in church than in the supermarket... We must constantly refuse the suggestion that he is 'here but 'not there.'" Recognizing the availability of our Father is vital to any of us who believe that prayer goes beyond the roof.

*A Center of Quiet* is a very readable, worthy work to add to your library. Its Usefulness goes far beyond the reading as it adds discussion and reflection material for personal or class use. This is more than just another text written by a priest; it speaks to you wherever you may be.

**Doug Conder  
Eudora, Kansas**

### **Ordering Your Private World, by, Gordon MacDonald, Nelson, 1985.**

Bookstores, catalogues, bookshelves and closets are filled with time management and organization books, systems, calendars, journals, and even computer programs including both the secular and the spiritual. Some of these are well worn from consistent use, while most gather the dust of good intentions. At first glance, Gordon MacDonald's book, *Ordering Your Private World*, might look like all the other time management books on the market, but with a biblical twist. But this book definitely deserves a closer look. MacDonald spends little time with systems or schedules and other outward aspects of an orderly life. He differentiates between one's outer, public world, which is "more measurable, visible, and expandable" and is "easiest to evaluate in terms of success, popularity, wealth, and beauty," and one's inner world. The inner world is more spiritual and is "the center in which choices and values can be determined, where solitude and reflection might be pursued, . . . and where the moral and spiritual pollution of the times need not penetrate." This spiritual realm of an individual's life is MacDonald's focus, his/her private world.

MacDonald has penned an orderly book. Each chapter opens with a "Memo to the Disorganized" which gives the chapter's thesis. Again, one must remember that he is referring to a spiritual disorder rather physical, though he does note that physical confusion is often a symptom of a deeper spiritual chaos. He believes that to bring order to "the private world where Christ chooses to live is to invite his

control over every segment of one's life," and this is "both a lifelong and daily matter." He also reminds the reader that "something within—the Bible calls it sin—resists both His residence and all of the resulting order."

MacDonald divides the private world into five sectors, and he spends several chapters on each sector. In the first sector, "Motivation," he asks the reader to consider whether he/she is "called" or "driven," and gives biblical examples for each type of motivation. A Christ-led center will result in a "called" person who understands God's mission for his/her life, while a disordered center leads to an endless search for outward approval. Other sectors include: "Use of Time," "Wisdom and Knowledge," "Spiritual Strength," and "Restoration." MacDonald gives practical lessons on the uses of time from the life and work of Jesus. He notes that people spend time in the area of their priorities. He recommends discipline of the mind as well as the spirit, and suggests that "Christians ought to be the strongest, broadest, most creative thinkers in the world." MacDonald considers the human soul, a person's spiritual identity, to be the "garden of his inner world," the place where "the Spirit of God comes to make self-disclosure, to share wisdom, and to give direction and guidance." This garden is fragile and must be carefully maintained with Bible study, mediation, and prayer. He makes a careful distinction between cultivation of one's private spiritual garden and the popular "quiet time" daily devotions which emphasizes outward results of chapters read or minutes spent in prayer. He believes a private center developed secretly with God cannot be reduced to a system. Finally, an ordered center gives the individual an opportunity to experience the "rest" which only results from harmony with God's will.

MacDonald describes an orderly private world which is biblically sound and essential to any Christian who truly wants a quiet soul where Christ resides in control of his/her life. He warns that the "average Christian does not really seek an ordered private world as a top priority." He suggests that perhaps sin entices humankind to find "human effectiveness through busyness, frantic programming, material accumulation, and rushing to various conferences, seminars, films, and special speakers." In contrast, a center ordered by God "is filled by the strength of God as Holy Spirit."

**Mikee Delony**

## **A Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life**, by William Law (1728).

There are times in one's life when God reveals his secrets in interesting ways. He brings people in and out of our lives according to his plan. His timing is perfect. The timing of my own journey to this book was an interesting one. A member of our congregation kept referring to *Winged Life* by Hannah Hurnard, a book she was reading. I finally became intrigued enough to seek it in the library. In it, I was introduced to William Law and his work called *A Spirit of Love*. I then discovered it was included in his *A serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, a one-volume collection. Since I am one who finds it necessary to start at the beginning and work my way through, I began reading the entire volume.

Prior to reading this work by Law, I had read several selections on the spiritual disciplines and found Richard Foster's to be the most challenging and helpful. Discovering Law's book has brought a greater challenge. The title says it all, but the word "Serious" could perhaps be replaced with "Critical." Law leaves nothing unturned in calling the reader to take seriously the call to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Most will find the work offensive because of the severity of the call. His application of the Word will challenge the lifestyles and thinking of most modern-day readers.

Law shows how no area of life is untouched by the hand of God. "As a good Christian should consider every place as holy because God is there, so he should look upon every part of his life as a matter of holiness because it is to be offered unto God." The "rules" by which William Law lived were strict and formidable. If we keep an open mind as we read his thoughts, there are some rich nuggets to be found, as well as veins of truth. In Chapter 24 Law gives a word of caution to those who may be "put off" by the apparent strictness of the "life."

So that the whole of the matter is plainly this: Virginitiy, voluntary poverty, and such other restraints of lawful things are not necessary to Christian perfection but are much to be commended in those who choose them as helps and means of a more safe and speedy arrival at it. It is only in this manner and in this sense that I would recommend any particularity of life, not as if perfection consisted in it, but because of its great tendency to produce and support the true spirit of Christian perfection.

Though written in the 1700's, he seems to be addressing the spirit of our age also when he continues, "But because of this polite age of ours we have so lived away from the spirit of devotion that many seem afraid even to be suspected of it, imagining great

devotion to be great bigotry, that it is founded in ignorance and poorness of spirit, and that little, weak, and dejected minds are generally the greatest proficient in it."

I highly recommend this reading and the challenges it presents readers of this present age.

**Jim Dalton**  
**Kansas City, Missouri**

**Disciplines for the Inner Life**, By, Bob Benson Sr. and Michael W. Benson, Generoux Inc., Nashville, TN 37215, (615) 297-5558.

Imagine having a single volume that contains the best excerpts from 143 authors writing in 176 books. Now to this add the words for 52 well known hymns and scripture segments from almost every book of the Bible except the minor prophets (not noted for their devotional content anyway). This is what you will find in *Disciplines for the Inner Life* by Bob Benson, Sr. and Michael W. Benson. This book published in 1989 by Generoux Inc.; P. O. Box 158531; Nashville, TN; 37215; (615) 297-5558 is a compendium of devotional material arranged for daily use over an entire year.

The purpose of the authors is to assemble material that will "...provide insight and guidance for the formation and nourishment of the inner life." They have presented this material in a systemic and orderly manner making daily devotional use an unobtrusive and uncomplicated process. The book is divided into 52 weekly devotional guides arranged into five major sections. The sections include *Disciplines for the Inner Journey*, *Obstacles to the Inner Life*, *Patterns for Living Inward Graces of the Centered Life*, and *Outward Fruits of the Inner Life*. The 52 weekly guides cover a wide range of topics including but not limited to Solitude, Journalizing, Doubts, Time Management, The Beatitudes, Purity, and Compassion.

Each weekly guide opens with a prayer of invocation followed by a selection from the Psalms to be repeated daily for a week. Seven daily scriptures then follow that deal with the topic of the week. The

reader next finds several selections for meditation on the weekly topic written by various authors. There are always more than enough selections to use a different one daily. The selections are excerpts from such authors as John Baillie, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas A. Kempis, C. S. Lewis, Henri J. Nouwen, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and John Stott among many others. A time after the selections for meditation is designated to engage in personal meditation. This writer has found this to be an ideal time for reflection and journalizing. A devotional prayer, hymn selection, and Benediction conclude the weekly guides.

This book has been an excellent aid in developing a deeper more meaning spiritual walk and continues to be an unequalled resource for this writer. In the introductory section the authors state their desire that “. . .this will lead you along the pathway to a deeper life in God.” This book is very capable of reaching that goal.

**John L. Lee**

**Pensees**, By, Blaise Pascal, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, Penguin Books, 1966.

Blaise Pascal (b. 1623) seemed, as a youth, destined to make his mark in mathematics or physics. He was born to privilege. Horizontal thinkers who envisioned new societies based on the leadership of critical reason were among his conversational partners. He looked into the inner workings of church and state through the critical eyes of his father, legal officer often at odds with Richelieu. None of his friends or relatives would have anticipated he would leave thoughts behind—thoughts about human potential for good and for evil, about faith and reason, about distraction, about philosophy and Christian thought, about paradox and hiddenness—which would grip readers in future generations.

Indeed, by his account, it took an extraordinary experience to reposition his thoughts on subjects he regarded to be much more fundamental and difficult than the scientific subjects that had previously preoccupied him. His sisters, who had entered Port Royal convent outside Paris after their father's death,

would have attributed his change to answered prayer. The event—a carriage accident on the streets of Paris—left the social elitist Pascal hanging between life and death. A piece of parchment was found sewn into Pascal's clothing after his death which recounted the decisive experience in 1654:

From about half past ten in the evening  
until half past midnight.

Fire

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of  
Jacob,' not philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus  
Christ.

'My God and your God.' 'Thy God shall be  
my God.'

The world forgotten, and everything  
except God.

He can only be found by the ways taught  
in the Gospels.

Greatness of the human soul.

'O righteous Father, the world had not  
known thee, but I have known thee.'

Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

I have cut myself off from him.

'They have forsaken me, the fountain of  
living waters.'

'My God wilt thou forsake me?'

Let me not be cut off from him for ever!

'And this is life eternal, that they might  
know thee, the only true God, and Jesus  
Christ whom thou hast sent.'

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ

Pascal had restored to him the joy of salvation. In his day, he made a literary mark with his *Provincial Letters*. Written under pseudonym, Pascal defended the few Port Royal loyalists who, against relentless ecclesiastical and political opposition, remained focused on a more Augustinian understanding of human nature and divine intent. However, his primary task was to find the wording needed to get the attention of his still cabaret-distracted friends. He died (1662) before finishing this task. His vivid analysis of human nature and human reason—he postulated that Cleopatra's nose had altered the course of civilization—was widely rejected by his and subsequent generations as retaining too much of the despair about being human in traditional theology and too little of the optimism characteristic of “enlightenment.”

In ways, Pascal's defense of believing in a day of skepticism appears to have differed from Locke's later *The Reasonableness if Christianity* more in

## Notes From "Rest"

<sup>1</sup> Julian Morgenstern, "Sabbath," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4: 135.

<sup>2</sup> Wilfred Stott, "Sabbath, Lord's Day," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 405-411.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, "Stop!" *Old Testament and Christian Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 27-38.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *Your Right to Rest* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne E. Oates, *Your Right to Rest*, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), p. 165.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Minirth, Paul Meier, Don Hawkins and Richard Flournoy, *How to Beat Burnout* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), p. 105; Robert Brinsmead, *This is Life* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict, 1978), pp. 45-46.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Old Testament and Christian Preaching*, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Elton and Pauline Trueblood, *The Recovery of Family Life* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 122.

<sup>10</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" (1872).

## Notes From "Don't Just Do Something . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in David Manning White, *The Affirmation of God*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Park McLaughlin, *Meeting God in Silence*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Tilden H. Edwards, "Spiritual Friend," quoted in *Disciplines for the Inner Life*, (Waco: Word Books, 1985), pp. 47-48.

<sup>4</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, (New York: HarperCollins Pub., 1981) pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth O'Connor, *Search for Silence*, (Waco: Word Books, 1971), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> "Psalm 23, Antithesis," *Discipleship Journal* (December 1990), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*, (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1983), p. 377.

<sup>8</sup> *The Rhythm of Life*, (Tulsa: Harrison House, Inc., 1987) p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Roster, *Celebration of Discipline*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 6:6

<sup>11</sup> *Nurturing Silence in a Noisy Heart*, (New

York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1979), pp. 11-18

<sup>12</sup> Frederick William Faber, Quoted in David Manning White, *The Search for God*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), p. 178.

<sup>13</sup> *Christian Perfection* (Minneapolis: Dimension books, 1975), p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> Howard R. Macy, *Rhythms of the Inner Life*, (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, Company, 1988), p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Amos 4:21-23

<sup>16</sup> Andy T. Ritchie Jr., *Thou Shalt Worship the Lord Thy God*, (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1969), pp. 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> Mark 1:29-39.

<sup>18</sup> Larry Wishard, *Jesus and Quiet Time*, (Fortworth: Star Bible Publications, 1986), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Katharina von Schlegel (b. 1697), Translated by Jane L. Borthwick (1813-1894).

<sup>20</sup> Nouwen, pp.48.

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from Oates, pp. 112-113.

## Notes From "A Funny Thing Happened . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working The Angles*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 9:27.

<sup>3</sup> As told by Sam Stone, *The Christian Minister*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Stone, *The Christian Minister*, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> George Seldes (compiler), *The Great Thoughts*, p. 453.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Exley, *The Rhythm of Life*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Exley, *The Rhythm of Life*, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Working The Angles*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Prior, *The Way of Holiness*, p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Prior, *The Way of Holiness*, p.41

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Prior, *The Way of Holiness*, pp. 43-51.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Taylor, *The Disciplined Life*, pp. 48-62.

<sup>13</sup> *Leadership*, Winter Quarter, 1982, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> *Leadership*, Winter Quarter, 1982, p.25.

<sup>15</sup> *Leadership*, Winter Quarter, 1982, p.25.

## Notes From "Personal Spirituality . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Steve Meeks, *Relational Christianity*