



Spirituality of Paul

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Patrick J. Hartin

with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



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Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

Spirituality of Paul

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into seven lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet seven times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.


Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website (littlerockscripture.org).

Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gatherings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree

how much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- Commentary by Patrick J. Hartin, which has also been published separately as *A Window into the Spirituality of Paul* (Liturgical Press).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting elements of the Scripture being studied. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the video lectures available online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: [\[redacted\]](#) Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.
- Read the assigned material for Lesson One (pages 12–18) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session.

- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 19–21.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 22 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- View the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. View the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

A note to individuals

- If you are using this resource for individual study, simply move at your own pace. Take as much time as you need to read, study, and pray with the material.
- If you would like to share this experience with others, consider inviting a friend or family member to join you for your next study. Even a small group of two or three provides an opportunity for fruitful dialog and faith-sharing!

Spirituality of Paul

LESSON ONE

Introduction: Context for Exploring Paul's Spirituality

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, with a blinding light you opened the eyes of your servant Paul and called him to be an emissary of the gospel. May our study of his life and letters kindle in our hearts the desire to be your true and faithful disciples.

Read pages 12–18, Lesson One.

Respond to the questions on pages 19–21, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 22 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT FOR EXPLORING PAUL'S SPIRITUALITY

Paul is unique in the pages of the New Testament. Of all the people appearing in the Bible, none is known to us as well as Saul/Paul of Tarsus. Thirteen letters are attributed to him in the New Testament.¹ In more than two-thirds of the Acts of the Apostles (chaps. 9–28), Paul is the central figure guiding the establishment and growth of early Christian communities. Practically half the New Testament, then, bears Paul's stamp and influence.

Paul also holds a unique position at the foundation of Christian spirituality. With the gospels, we have writings from four individual followers of Jesus who have recorded their insights into the life and message of Jesus of Nazareth. In the case of Paul, there is a marked difference. He witnesses the life-transforming experience he had on the road to Damascus that gave his life new purpose and direction. Through the grace of this encounter, Paul illuminates the spiritual meaning of the cross and resurrection for the lives of second-generation Christians. With the gospels, we have a very limited amount of material; with Paul, we have thirteen letters and the Acts of the Apostles to guide our examination. Not only do we have his words, but from the very nature of his correspondence we gain more insight into Paul's character as well as his personal response to the transformative power of Jesus Christ in his life. We can view his spirituality in action.

What Is Christian Spirituality?

While "spirituality" has roots within the framework of Christianity, today the term has branched out to encompass much more. In more recent times, spirituality has grown in popularity within society and has broadened its perspective to such an extent that it is sometimes very difficult to define its meaning. From the influences of psychology and the social sciences, spirituality tends to embrace whatever brings personal well-being and human growth.



In its widest sense, spirituality refers to the life of the spirit as opposed to the material aspect of the human person. As defined in the dictionary, *spiritual* pertains "to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature."² In its origins the word "spirit" (*ruah* in Hebrew; *pneuma* in Greek; *spiritus* in Latin) refers to the "breath of life" or the human spirit that finds its ultimate origin in God. The second creation story in the book of Genesis presents a graphic picture of God as the Master Craftsman who takes soil from the ground and breathes life into his creation and makes of it a living being: "The LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). In an analogous way in the New Testament, God's Spirit is communicated to the believer who is recreated by the grace and life of God. The writings of Paul draw attention to this twofold understanding of the spirit: the human spirit and God's Spirit. God's grace transforms the human spirit, one's very being. Paul's conclusions to his letters often make this distinction between the human spirit and the divine spirit. Concluding his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Phil 4:23).