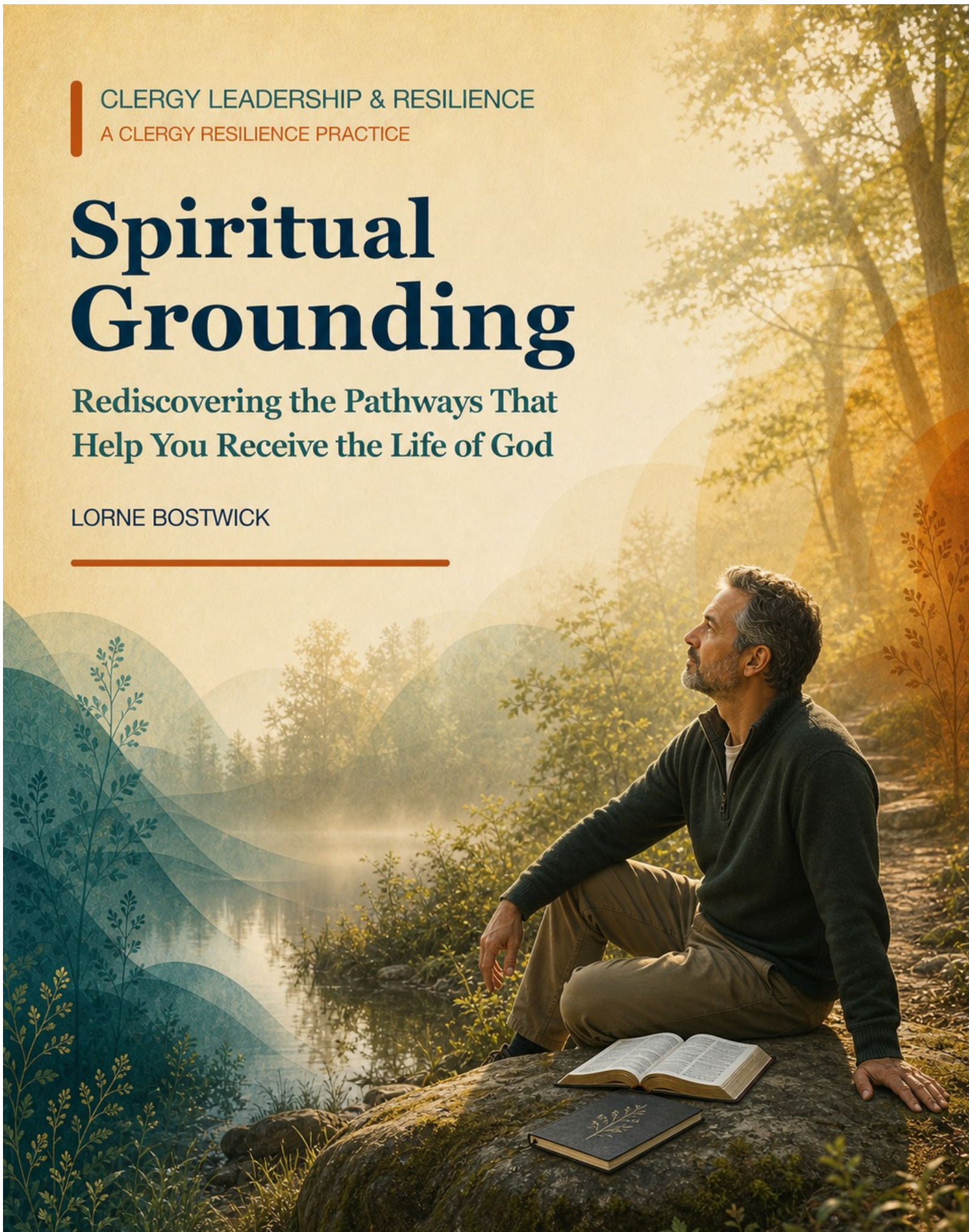


CLERGY LEADERSHIP & RESILIENCE
A CLERGY RESILIENCE PRACTICE

Spiritual Grounding

Rediscovering the Pathways That
Help You Receive the Life of God

LORNE BOSTWICK



Spiritual Grounding

Rediscovering the Pathways That Help You Receive the Life of God

CLERGY LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE SERIES

Returning reader? [Skip the Series Introduction and go directly to Beginning Here.](#)

About the Clergy Resilience Series

Ministry can be deeply life-giving. It can also wear you down.

The work asks us to enter people's grief, conflict, fear, hope, illness, joy, disappointment, and change. We preach and teach, lead organizations, respond to crises, manage conflict, accompany people through suffering, celebrate with them, make decisions, and carry responsibilities few people in our congregations ever fully see.

Sometimes we do all of that while trying to make sense of what is happening in our own lives.

Over time, ministry leaves its mark.

You may notice that you are more tired than you used to be. Criticism stays with you longer. You carry other people's problems home. Saying no produces guilt. Conflict occupies your mind long after the meeting ends. Prayer has become something you do professionally rather than something that nourishes you. Perhaps you feel lonely, spiritually dry, cynical, constantly hurried, or simply beaten up.

These experiences do not necessarily mean you are failing at ministry.

They may mean that something deserves your attention.

Resilience Is More Than Endurance

Clergy resilience is sometimes understood as the ability to withstand the pressures of ministry—to become tougher, develop thicker skin, recover more quickly, and keep going.

But resilience is not simply endurance.

Nor is it another name for self-care.

Resilience is the developing capacity to remain personally healthy, relationally connected, spiritually grounded, and vocationally faithful through the ordinary and extraordinary stresses of ministry.

That capacity develops over time.

Emotional awareness helps us recognize what is happening within us. Differentiation helps us distinguish what belongs to us from what belongs to someone else. Boundaries protect what matters. Relationships keep us from practicing ministry alone. Prayer reconnects us with the source of our vocation. Rest and recreation restore capacities that ministry consumes. Attention to sleep, nutrition, movement, and physical health reminds us that our bodies are not separate from our spiritual and emotional lives. Systems awareness helps us remain grounded when congregations become anxious. Reflection and discernment help us recognize when something needs to change.

These are not techniques for making us invulnerable.

They are practices that help us remain available to God, to others, and to ourselves.

Self-Giving, Not Self-Erasure

Christian ministry involves sacrifice.

There will be nights when someone is dying and sleep will have to wait. There will be seasons when the needs of a congregation require more from us than usual. Love costs something. Vocation costs something. Following Christ has never promised a life protected from sacrifice.

The question is not whether ministry will ask something of us.

It will.

The more important question is what kind of sacrifice faithfulness requires.

Jesus' life was profoundly self-giving, but it was not indiscriminately available. He withdrew to pray. He rested. He received food and hospitality. He lived in relationship with companions. He left places where people were still looking for him. He sometimes moved toward one need while passing by another. The existence of a genuine need did not, by itself, determine what he was called to do.

That matters for pastors.

People may genuinely need us and yet their need may not always be ours to meet. Someone may be disappointed by a boundary we establish without that boundary being unfaithful. Rest may sometimes be more faithful than another meeting. Prayer may take us away from people who want our attention precisely because we need to remember whose ministry this is.

Christian ministry calls us to self-giving, not self-erasure.

Resilience helps us give ourselves faithfully without losing the self God has given us to offer.

The distinction matters because suffering itself is not evidence of faithfulness. Exhaustion is not proof of devotion. Being indispensable is not the same as being called. Allowing ourselves to be consumed by every legitimate need around us does not necessarily make us more Christlike.

Faithful sacrifice is ordered toward life.

Sometimes it asks a great deal of us. Sometimes it stretches capacities we did not know we possessed. But resilience helps us recover, learn, mature, and return. It preserves and develops our capacity to love, serve, discern, and give again.

So one question runs quietly beneath every resource in this series:

Is this helping me become more capable of faithful self-giving, or am I simply being consumed?

Start Where You Are

This series is not a training program to complete.

There is no prescribed sequence. There is no expectation that you work through every resource. You may never need some of them.

Begin instead with what is wearing on you now.

Perhaps you need stronger boundaries. Perhaps you need to understand why a particular situation makes you so angry. Maybe you need relationships in which no one needs you to be their pastor. Perhaps you need a way to recover after demanding weeks, or help sorting out what belongs to you and what you have been carrying for someone else.

Perhaps ministry has hurt you and you need to tend the wound.

Perhaps you have stopped doing things that give you joy.

Perhaps your body is telling you something you have been too busy to hear.

Perhaps you are beginning to wonder whether something about your vocation needs to change.

Start there.

Each resource in this series focuses on one dimension of clergy resilience. It is designed to be read in about an hour and practiced for approximately a month.

The reading introduces the practice.

The month is where the learning happens.

You will be invited to notice what happens in ordinary ministry, experiment with a few practices, reflect on what you discover, and gradually decide what is useful enough to carry forward.

There is nothing to complete here.

You are practicing, not performing.

If you miss several days, begin again. If a practice doesn't fit, adapt it. If you discover that the issue you started with isn't really the issue, follow what you are learning.

The purpose is not to become proficient at another program. It is to become more attentive to yourself, your relationships, your vocation, and the presence of God within all of them.

You Were Never Meant to Do This Alone

Personal practices matter, but clergy resilience is not solely an individual responsibility.

Sometimes pastors become depleted because we have developed unhealthy patterns. Sometimes we are depleted because we are serving within unhealthy systems. Often both are true.

No amount of emotional intelligence can make an abusive situation healthy. Better boundaries cannot eliminate every unreasonable expectation. Prayer cannot substitute for sleep. A vacation cannot repair chronic organizational dysfunction. And resilience should never become an excuse for asking clergy to endure circumstances that need to change.

Healthy resilience includes knowing when we need someone else.

A trusted colleague, friend, clergy cohort, coach, spiritual director, therapist, physician, mentor, or denominational leader may sometimes be part of what faithful resilience requires.

Seeking support is not evidence that resilience has failed.

Relationship is one of the ways resilience develops.

One Practice at a Time

You do not need to become perfectly resilient before you can practice healthy ministry.

Resilience develops as we live.

Notice one thing.

Practice one thing.

Pay attention to what changes.

At the end of the month, you may decide to continue the practice. You may choose another resource because something else now needs attention. Or you may simply return to your life and ministry carrying one new capacity with you.

That is enough.

Read for an hour. Practice for a month. Then ask what you need next.

Beginning Here

Pastors spend much of their lives in the presence of holy things.

You open Scripture, compose prayers, plan worship, preach sermons, administer sacraments, accompany suffering, and help others listen for the movement of the Spirit. Sacred language fills your days. Yet you can handle holy things continually and still feel far from the life they are meant to give.

The Bible becomes material for Sunday. Prayer becomes language offered on behalf of someone else. Worship becomes a sequence to manage. Even silence can feel like one more discipline at which you are failing.

Spiritual dryness is not always a sign that faith has disappeared. Sometimes the practices that once nourished you have become professionalized. Sometimes exhaustion has narrowed your capacity for attention. Sometimes grief, conflict, depression, trauma, illness, or a change in season has made an old practice difficult. Sometimes you have simply been trying to receive through a form that does not fit the way your spirit is presently able to attend.

One pastor still loves Scripture but cannot open a Bible without beginning to prepare. Another finds that words have worn thin after years of public prayer and becomes attentive through color, image, and silence. A third has spent so long indoors tending an institution that the woods restore a forgotten sense of creatureliness. Another needs the rigor of study, the honest resistance of a difficult text, or the voices of a community gathered around Scripture. None is more spiritual than the others. Each is learning to become available to God without performing a borrowed form of devotion.

Not everyone tends the spirit in the same way.

One person becomes receptive before a candle or a work of sacred art. Another meets God in close study of a biblical text. Someone else needs the steady movement of walking, the quiet of the woods, the wide horizon of a mountaintop, the sound of music, the cadence of spiritual poetry, the texture of clay, the companionship of shared prayer, or the silence that follows words.

These differences are not deficiencies. They arise from the varied ways embodied, storied, sensing, thinking, relational creatures receive and respond to grace.

This booklet offers permission to rediscover those ways. It is neither a competition among spiritual practices nor a promise that the right technique will produce a religious feeling. It is a month of learning: noticing how you become available to God, reclaiming practices that ministry has turned into work, exploring pathways you may have neglected, and establishing a sustainable rhythm of return.

The central question is:

What helps me become present and receptive to the God who is already present to me?

This question does not make personal preference the measure of faith. Christian practices do more than soothe us or confirm what we already believe. They locate us within the story of God, turn us toward Christ, open us to the Spirit, join us to a people, and return us to love of God and neighbor. The form may vary. The center does not.

Spiritual Grounding Is a Return

Spiritual grounding is the repeated return to the presence of God through practices that help us become receptive, attentive, and alive.

The word grounding can suggest that we secure ourselves by our own effort. Christian spiritual grounding begins elsewhere. God is already present. Grace precedes our attention. No correct technique summons the Spirit; no devotional routine makes God more available.

We practice because our attention wanders, our lives fragment, and ministry can train us to approach everything—even God—with a task in hand. Spiritual practice is a way of consenting again to reality: God is God. We are creatures. We are loved before we are useful. The world is larger than the work immediately before us.

Grace is the theological center. We do not manufacture spiritual energy or persuade God to draw near. The Spirit awakens, gathers, convicts, comforts, and gives life. Our practices answer that initiative. They are small acts of availability to what can only be received.

Grounding does not always feel peaceful. Prayer may uncover grief. Scripture may unsettle us. Beauty may awaken longing. Silence may reveal how tired or angry we are. A walk may make room for a question we have avoided. The measure is not pleasant feeling but truthful presence before God.

Nor is it escape from the material world. In Jesus Christ, God does not disdain creaturely life but enters it. The Christian hope is not that the spirit will rise above bodies, places, relationships, or limits. God meets us through words, water, bread, bodies, neighbors, memory, imagination, and the created world. Spiritual grounding should return us more fully to the life God has given, not help us float above it.

This is why Sabbath, delight, and receptivity belong here. Sabbath interrupts the illusion that everything depends upon our labor. Delight receives goodness without first making it useful. Receptivity allows us to be addressed, nourished, and loved. Together they loosen ministry's grip—the pressure to turn every encounter into production.

When Sacred Things Become Work

The occupational difficulty of ministry is not simply that pastors are busy. The very practices through which many Christians receive spiritual nourishment are also the pastor's instruments of work.

A pastor opens a Gospel story, and the mind begins outlining a sermon. A phrase becomes a teaching point. An unresolved question becomes a book to consult. The text is opened with a congregation already in the room.

A pastor attends worship, but the microphone is too quiet. A visitor looks confused. The transition came late. Someone will need attention after the service. Even when another person leads, the pastor may remain inwardly on duty.

A pastor rarely prays only as a private person. Prayer becomes public language—language that must be theologically sound, pastorally sensitive, concise, inclusive, and responsive to the moment. A pastor can become skilled at voicing a community's prayers while losing access to prayer that is unfinished, wordless, or deeply personal.

Professional competence is not the enemy. Careful study, thoughtful worship, and responsible leadership matter. The trouble begins when no relationship with Scripture, prayer, worship, or sacred attention remains protected from the need to produce something for someone else.

The question is not, "How do I stop being a pastor?" It is, "Where may I come before God without turning the encounter into ministry?"

Receptivity Has More Than One Door

Christian tradition offers no single required temperament for encountering God. Scripture itself is intellectually rich, sensuous, poetic, communal, embodied, contemplative, musical, dramatic, and rooted in creation.

Moses turns aside to see a bush aflame. Elijah listens beyond wind, earthquake, and fire. The psalmists pray through poetry and song. The prophets walk, build, eat, weep, and enact signs. Jesus withdraws to lonely places, climbs mountains, attends feasts, tells stories drawn from soil and seed, touches bodies, asks questions, breaks bread, and prays through the night. The early church studies teaching, shares possessions and meals, worships, serves, travels, argues, discerns, and waits upon the Spirit together.

No single practice contains the whole of spiritual life. What opens one person may leave another distracted. What nourished you ten years ago may not meet you in the same way now. A practice suited to a spacious season may become inaccessible when you are grieving, parenting, caregiving, ill, depressed, or exhausted.

Practices also serve different purposes. Some settle scattered attention. Some deepen understanding. Some give grief a language. Some restore wonder. Some reconnect us to the body or created world. Some place us within the worship and wisdom of the church. Some lead toward discernment and action. A healthy spiritual life need not ask one favorite practice to do all of this work.

Some common pathways include:

- **Scripture and theological reflection:** slow reading, study, lectio divina, imaginative contemplation, memorization, or praying a short passage.
- **Silence and contemplative attention:** centering prayer, breath prayer, stillness, meditation before a candle, or resting without words.
- **Visual and imaginative attention:** icons, paintings, photography, color, film, architecture, or creating an image in response to prayer.
- **Creation and place:** woods, gardens, water, weather, mountains, night skies, neighborhood streets, or attentive care for the earth.
- **Movement and embodied practice:** walking, stretching, dancing, kneeling, gardening, pilgrimage, handwork, or another gentle rhythm of the body.
- **Language, poetry, and story:** spiritual poetry, memoir, fiction, journaling, written prayer, or a line carried through the day.
- **Music and sound:** hymns, chant, instrumental music, congregational singing, birdsong, or deliberate quiet.
- **Sacrament and community:** Communion, baptismal remembrance, shared prayer, spiritual friendship, worship in which you have no leadership role, or service alongside others.
- **Creativity and making:** painting, woodworking, cooking, sewing, pottery, photography, or any practice through which attention, delight, and offering come together.

These are not spiritual types into which you must sort yourself. Most people receive through several doors, and the church needs practices that are personal without becoming merely private. The purpose is not to name your permanent category but to notice what helps you become honestly present now—and what keeps that encounter connected to the wider life of faith.

Freedom Within a Christian Center

Permission matters because pastors often carry an inner picture of what a serious devotional life should look like: a chair, an open Bible, a journal, an early hour. That pattern may be deeply life-giving. It is not the only faithful pattern.

Yet spiritual grounding is more than choosing whatever feels good. Christian practice is held within relationship—with the God revealed in Jesus Christ, with Scripture and the wisdom of the church, with the Spirit's transforming work, and with neighbors whom we are called to love. Personal receptivity and communal faith belong together.

This gives us both freedom and a center. You are free to encounter God through the senses, intellect, imagination, body, creation, art, silence, service, sacrament, and companionship. You are also invited to discern the fruit. Does the practice make you more truthful, more able to receive grace, more rooted in Christ, and more available for love? Does it enlarge your participation in life, or does it help you evade it?

Discernment: Restoration, Avoidance, and Compulsion

Almost any activity can become spiritually meaningful, and almost any activity can become avoidance.

A walk in the woods may open a person to wonder, lament, gratitude, and creaturely belonging. It may also become a way never to face a needed conversation. Bible study may deepen love of God and neighbor. It may also protect a person from feeling anything that cannot be analyzed. Silence may cultivate surrender, or it may become withdrawal. Service may express love, or it may preserve the belief that one is valuable only when useful.

The answer is not suspicion of pleasure or rest. Delight is not spiritual laziness. God's good creation does not need a religious label before it can become a place of encounter. Still, wise discernment asks about the fruit.

Afterward, are you more able to tell the truth? More available to love? More aware of your limits? More connected to your body and the world? More able to receive grace? More willing to act faithfully?

No practice will produce all of these fruits every time. But over time, spiritual grounding should enlarge truthful participation in life rather than shrink it.

Dryness, Distress, and the Need for Care

Not every loss of spiritual energy can be addressed by changing devotional practices.

Difficulty concentrating, loss of pleasure, sleep disruption, hopelessness, panic, intrusive memories, profound fatigue, or persistent numbness may accompany depression, anxiety, trauma, burnout, grief, medical conditions, or medication effects. Spiritual practices can support care, but they should not be used to explain away suffering or substitute for qualified help.

Spiritual injury may also require careful companionship. If Scripture, prayer, church language, or images of God have been used to control, shame, or silence you, returning to them may need to happen slowly and with a trustworthy spiritual director, therapist, pastoral caregiver, or other appropriately trained companion.

God is not honored by forcing yourself through a practice that overwhelms you. A smaller, safer doorway may be more faithful. Sometimes the next spiritual practice is making a medical appointment, telling someone the truth, sleeping, eating, grieving, or allowing another person to pray when you cannot.

A Month of Spiritual Grounding

The next four weeks cultivate four capacities, each building upon the last:

**Notice How You Receive → Reclaim What Became Work → Explore Another Pathway →
Establish a Rhythm of Return**

During Week One, you will notice the conditions and experiences in which you become spiritually receptive.

During Week Two, you will reclaim one practice that ministry has professionalized.

During Week Three, you will experiment with several pathways without demanding that any of them succeed.

During Week Four, you will build a flexible rhythm that can support different seasons of life and ministry.

Each movement remains in use as the next is added. Your Week One observations guide the practice you reclaim in Week Two. The boundary you establish in Week Two protects the experiments of Week Three from becoming ministry material. What you learn in all three weeks becomes the rhythm you shape in Week Four.

The goal is not four weeks of spiritual intensity. It is the growing ability to recognize—and return to—the practices through which you receive the life of God.

Week One — Notice How You Receive

The first movement is attention. Before adding another discipline, notice where spiritual life is already stirring.

Pastors often begin with obligation: What should I be doing? Begin instead with a more revealing question: When have I felt most honestly present to God, to myself, to another person, or to the created world?

Do not confine your memory to conventionally religious moments. Perhaps you felt it while singing beside a hospital bed, studying a difficult text, watching light cross a wall, planting tomatoes, sitting in an empty sanctuary, listening to a symphony, laughing with friends, walking beside water, holding a grandchild, or standing beneath a wide sky.

The experience itself is not proof of divine endorsement. Feeling alive does not automatically make an activity faithful, and feeling unsettled does not mean God is absent. Aliveness is simply a clue about attention and receptivity—one clue to be held alongside Scripture, the character of Christ, the wisdom of trusted community, and the fruit that follows.

Practice: Keep an Aliveness Record

For seven days, pause once near the end of the day. Record one moment when you felt even slightly more awake, spacious, connected, truthful, grateful, moved, or receptive.

Use these prompts:

- Where was I?
- What was I doing—or not doing?
- Was I alone or with others?
- Which senses were engaged?
- What happened in my body?
- What feeling or longing appeared?
- Did a word, image, question, memory, or silence remain with me?
- Did the moment turn me toward God, life, neighbor, truth, beauty, lament, or gratitude?

Keep the record modest. You are noticing patterns, not manufacturing experiences.

Notice Your Conditions for Attention

At the end of the week, review what you wrote. Look for recurring conditions:

- Quiet or sound

- Solitude or companionship
- Stillness or movement
- Structure or openness
- Words or images
- Indoors or outdoors
- Familiarity or discovery
- Intellectual engagement or sensory attention
- Early morning, midday, evening, or night

You may discover that you need solitude before community, movement before stillness, beauty before words, or study before contemplation. Perhaps attention comes in brief openings rather than long retreats.

Receive the discovery without ranking it. Needing visual beauty is not less serious than loving exegesis. Needing movement is not an inability to pray. Loving careful study is not spiritual coldness. Become available as the person God created, not as the devotional person you imagine a pastor ought to be.

A Ten-Minute Practice

Choose one condition that appeared in your record. Give it ten protected minutes on three days this week.

If you noticed visual receptivity, sit with a painting, icon, photograph, or candle. If movement helped, walk without listening to anything. If language opened you, read one poem slowly. If study brought life, follow one biblical question without preparing to teach it. If music helped, listen without multitasking.

Begin with a simple prayer:

God who is already here, help me become present.

End without evaluating the practice. Simply name what you noticed.

Reflection at the End of Week One

- What made attention easier?
- What repeatedly scattered me?
- Which moments felt restorative? Which felt demanding?
- What surprised me about how I receive?
- What permission do I need to carry into next week?

Week Two — Reclaim What Became Work

The second movement addresses a particular wound of ministry: a practice that once gave life has become inseparable from professional responsibility.

The goal is not to make Bible study, prayer, or worship less responsible. It is to recover a protected encounter in which you are producing nothing for a congregation.

Return to your Week One record. Choose one practice that once helped you receive but now feels primarily vocational. Work with only one this week. The continuity matters: you are not adding an arbitrary discipline but responding to what you have begun to notice.

Reading Scripture Without Preparing

Pastors are trained to interpret, and the interpretive mind awakens quickly: historical setting, literary structure, theological claim, congregational application, sermon illustration. These capacities are gifts. Devotional reading simply asks that they not govern every encounter.

Try this approach:

1. Choose a short passage you are not preaching or teaching soon.
2. Leave commentaries, sermon files, and note-taking tools elsewhere.
3. Read the passage aloud once.
4. Read it again slowly, noticing one word, image, tension, or question that draws your attention.
5. Resist turning that detail into a point. Let it address, trouble, comfort, or accompany you.
6. Sit quietly for two minutes.
7. Answer only: “What do I want to say to God?” and “What might I be invited to receive?”

If a sermon outline begins to form, do not scold yourself. Notice the professional reflex, then return to the text as a person before God.

You might also read in a translation you do not use for preaching, listen to an audio Bible while walking, copy a few verses by hand, or pray with a biblical image through drawing. Changing the mode can interrupt professional habit.

Praying Without Leading

Choose a form of prayer that does not require polished language.

- Repeat a brief breath prayer.
- Sit before a candle and offer no words.
- Write an uncensored prayer you will never read publicly.
- Pray a psalm without improving its theology or tone.
- Allow music to carry prayer.
- Ask a trusted person to pray for you while you receive.

Pastors often know how to pray for others more readily than they know how to be held in prayer. Receiving prayer is part of this practice.

Worshipping Without Responsibility

If possible, attend worship where you have no role and are unlikely to be recognized as the responsible pastor. Let another person choose the texts, pace, music, and words. Notice the urge to evaluate. Then notice what it is like to be one worshiper among others.

If attending elsewhere is not possible, create a brief service you will not lead for anyone else: light a candle, read a psalm, listen to one hymn, keep silence, and receive a blessing recorded or written by another person.

Protect the Practice from Extraction

During this week, do not use material from the reclaimed practice in a sermon, newsletter, meeting, or social media post. If an insight seems useful, trust that it can return later. For now, let it remain unharvested.

This boundary may feel wasteful. It is not. Sabbath makes room for experiences whose worth is not measured by what they produce. Love includes encounters that are never converted into output. Your spiritual life is not raw material for ministry.

At the end of each practice period, write one sentence beginning, “Today I received...” Do not write what you might teach. Name only what was given, what remained difficult, or what became more honest.

Reflection at the End of Week Two

- Which professional reflex appeared most quickly?
- What was difficult about not producing something?
- Could I receive Scripture, prayer, or worship as a person rather than a leader?
- What boundary would protect this practice in ordinary ministry?
- What grief surfaced as I recognized what work had taken from it?

Week Three — Explore Another Pathway

The third movement is experimentation. Habit, training, shame, or simple unfamiliarity can narrow the spiritual life. This week invites curiosity without turning spirituality into consumption.

You are not searching for the perfect practice. You are learning to recognize more than one doorway through which God may meet you.

Choose four practices from at least three different pathways. Let one be primarily sensory or visual, one embodied or creation-centered, one shaped by language or Scripture, and one communal or sacramental. Keep each experiment between fifteen and thirty minutes. Repeat one if it draws you back.

Carry forward the Week Two boundary: none of these experiments needs to become ministry material. Carry forward the Week One discipline of noticing: attend to conditions, responses, and fruit rather than deciding quickly whether a practice “worked.”

Visual Attention

Sit with a work of art, icon, photograph, stained-glass window, or natural object. Look slowly before naming what you see.

Notice color, light, shadow, gesture, distance, texture, and what lies outside the frame. What draws you? What do you resist? What prayer, question, memory, or longing arises?

Do not turn the image into an illustration. Let it remain more than something you can explain.

Candle and Contemplative Silence

Light a candle and sit comfortably. Let your gaze rest softly. Use a simple word—mercy, here, beloved, peace—or a brief phrase from Scripture when the mind wanders.

The purpose is neither to empty the mind nor to achieve calm. It is to practice returning without judgment. If stillness increases distress, shorten the time, keep your eyes open, feel your feet on the floor, or choose a more embodied practice.

Creation and Place

Walk in the woods, beside water, through a park, along a neighborhood street, or anywhere you can attend to more-than-human life. Leave headphones behind if it is safe to do so.

Notice five things you see, four you hear, three you feel, two you smell, and one for which you are grateful. Allow creation to be creation—not scenery arranged for your inspiration. You are one creature among others, dependent upon air, water, soil, season, and gift.

A mountain vista may awaken awe. So may a patch of moss, a city tree, or rain against a window. Attention does not require grandeur.

Poetry and Sacred Language

Choose a spiritual poem or a passage of prose that has not become part of your professional toolkit. Read it aloud three times. After each reading, leave silence.

Copy one line by hand and carry it through the day without explaining it. Let rhythm, image, and ambiguity do what analysis cannot do alone.

Movement and Making

Walk, stretch, garden, knit, carve, cook, paint, play an instrument, or work with clay. Choose something rhythmic enough to gather attention but not so demanding that performance takes over.

Begin by acknowledging your body as creaturely gift. Notice pressure, balance, texture, breath, repetition, and delight. Let the making remain unnecessary. It need not become useful, beautiful, shared, or sold.

Music and Sound

Listen to one piece of music without reading, driving, answering messages, or preparing worship. Attend to what happens in your breathing and imagination. If words are present, notice which phrase stays. If the music awakens grief or joy, allow the feeling to become prayer without requiring sentences.

Shared and Sacramental Practice

Share a simple meal, pray with a spiritual friend, receive Communion where you are not presiding, join a choir, sit with a small group in silence, or serve beside neighbors in a way that does not place you in charge.

Some people become receptive through companionship rather than solitude. This is not spiritual dependence. Christian life is irreducibly communal. The question is whether the relationship makes room for mutual presence rather than returning you to the pastoral role.

Discern the Fruit

After each experiment, write briefly:

- What helped me become present?
- What made the practice difficult?
- What arose—peace, boredom, grief, resistance, delight, nothing noticeable?
- Did I feel more embodied and truthful or more detached and performative?
- Would I try this again? What would I change?

Do not confuse novelty with depth or difficulty with failure. Some practices require familiarity. Others are simply not yours in this season. A practice may also be worth keeping because it challenges you, not because it feels immediately restorative. Receptivity includes comfort, but it also includes conviction, lament, wonder, and the call to love.

Reflection at the End of Week Three

- Which practice surprised me?
- Which pathway have I undervalued?
- Did I discover a form of attention that ministry has not colonized?
- Which practice invited truth rather than escape?
- What do I want to carry into a regular rhythm?

Week Four — Establish a Rhythm of Return

The fourth movement gathers what you have learned into a spiritual ecology—a small, interconnected pattern of practices rather than one technique expected to meet every need.

A rule of life can be helpful. It becomes harmful when it gives an exhausted pastor one more standard against which to measure failure. The aim is not an ideal schedule but a flexible pattern that makes return more likely.

Different seasons call for different practices. Silence may nourish you in ordinary time yet feel unbearable in acute grief. Study may awaken you when curiosity is alive yet burden you when you are depleted. Community may restore you after isolation; solitude may restore you after unbroken exposure to people.

A sustainable rhythm holds more than one doorway while remaining rooted in a coherent life with God. It includes personal practice and some form of connection to the worship, wisdom, and companionship of the Christian community. Pastors need places where they are not leading, but none of us can sustain faith entirely alone.

Build Three Levels of Practice

Create a rhythm with three levels.

A Brief Daily Return

Choose a practice that takes five to fifteen minutes and can survive an ordinary ministry day.

Examples include:

- Reading four lines of a psalm without preparing
- Lighting a candle and taking ten attentive breaths
- Walking once around the block without a phone
- Looking slowly at one image
- Listening to one piece of music
- Writing three lines of honest prayer
- Standing outside and noticing the sky

The daily practice is a doorway, not a quota. Missing a day is not a spiritual emergency. Simply return.

A Spacious Weekly Practice

Choose one practice that requires enough time to move beyond immediate hurry—perhaps forty-five minutes to two hours.

This might be a longer walk, unhurried Scripture reading, creative work, spiritual direction, worship without leadership, a visit to a gallery, shared prayer, gardening, poetry, silence, or time in a place that enlarges attention.

Protect this period as faithfully as you protect a meeting. Its purpose is not preparation, productivity, or recovery so that you can work harder.

A Seasonal Practice of Renewal

Name a practice that requires planning: a retreat day, a pilgrimage, an overnight stay in a quiet place, a recurring day in nature, a meeting with a spiritual director, an arts workshop, a Sabbath gathering, or a season of communal prayer.

Place the next occurrence on the calendar. A hoped-for retreat that is never scheduled cannot support a rhythm.

Create a Menu for Different Conditions

Alongside the rhythm, make a short menu:

- **When I am exhausted**, I can...
- **When I cannot concentrate**, I can...
- **When words feel empty**, I can...
- **When my body is restless**, I can...
- **When I feel isolated**, I can...
- **When I am grieving**, I can...
- **When I feel spiritually alive**, I can...

This prevents one practice from carrying the entire weight of your spiritual life. Build the menu from what you actually learned during the first three weeks, not from practices you think you should prefer.

Protect One Place from Professional Use

Choose one boundary that keeps the rhythm personal:

- A Bible or translation used only devotionally
- A journal that never becomes sermon material
- A worshiping community where you hold no leadership role
- A walking route without calls or podcasts
- A retreat day without planning work
- A creative practice you do not display or monetize
- A spiritual friendship in which you are not the designated caregiver

The boundary does not make the practice sacred. It makes room for you to receive without extracting.

Share the Rhythm with Someone

Tell one trusted person what you are trying. Ask for companionship, not surveillance. The person might join you for a walk, exchange poems, protect time on a shared calendar, pray with you, or simply ask what is giving life.

Spiritual grounding is personal, but it is not merely private. Communities help sustain practices that individuals cannot maintain through willpower alone. They also help us discern whether a practice is opening us toward truth and love or enclosing us within ourselves.

Reflection at the End of Week Four

- Which brief daily return is realistic?
- What weekly practice deserves protection?
- What seasonal practice needs to be scheduled?

- Which alternative will I use when my usual practice is inaccessible?
- Who can help me protect receptivity rather than measure performance?

Practicing Spiritual Grounding Beyond the Month

Spiritual grounding is not a project to complete. It is a way of returning.

You will change. So will your body, household, ministry setting, losses, questions, and capacities. The practices that meet you will change as well. Faithfulness does not require loyalty to a form that no longer gives life. It asks for continuing discernment about how you may become receptive to God within the life you are actually living.

Every few months, return to four questions:

- How am I receiving spiritual life now?
- What has become professionalized or performative?
- What doorway have I neglected?
- What rhythm would help me return in this season?

If a practice has gone dry, do not abandon it immediately or cling to it anxiously. Ask whether the dryness invites patience, adaptation, rest, companionship, or a different form of attention. Sometimes depth grows through steadiness. Sometimes grace calls through a new door.

Return as well to the life around you. Spiritual grounding bears fruit as you inhabit ministry without being consumed by it, receive others without controlling them, honor your creaturely limits, and recognize God beyond the institution's walls. The return to God and the return to life belong together.

A Pastoral Word

You do not need to become more religious to deserve God's presence.

You do not need to force stillness when your body needs to move, words when grief has taken them, or study when every page feels like work. You need not defend the place where beauty, nature, music, poetry, friendship, sacrament, or silence makes you available to grace.

Not every spiritually meaningful experience must become a sermon, program, lesson, or invitation to the congregation. Some encounters may remain between you and God. Some delight may simply be received.

The practices are not the source of spiritual life. God is.

Practices help you turn, notice, consent, and receive. They remind you that before you are a preacher, teacher, caregiver, administrator, or leader, you are a creature held within the life of God.

You are not manufacturing God's presence. You are learning, again and again, how to become present to the God who is already here.

A Closing Practice

Choose one doorway that has opened during this month. Enter it without hurry.

Become aware of your body and surroundings. Let the practice be simple. Do not ask it to prove anything.

When you are ready, pray:

God of grace, you are present before I seek you.

Meet me through the life you have given.

Free me from performing what I am meant to receive.

Teach me the pathways by which I become attentive, truthful, and alive.

Ground me in your love, and return me to the world ready to love.

Amen.