



Introduction

EVERYONE IS SPIRITUAL. Whether or not we are fully conscious of it, our spirits long to be united with a greater good, a deeper meaning, a wider love than we may experience in our everyday lives. We long for intimacy, to be connected, to belong, to be part of something or someone bigger than ourselves. We long to experience the connection to all that is within our universe and with the Creator who fashioned us and that universe. Yet, time seems to slip from our grasp, our days are filled with everyday tasks, and cultural values often draw us away from the most essential meaning of life—living in the presence of God and responding to the needs of God’s people.

In *Longing for the Holy*, we explore the implications of the central mysteries of faith—the Incarnation, Eucharist, and the Paschal Mystery—for spirituality. We attend to the cultural challenges that keep us from realizing our true desire and we consider the important themes of church community, justice, sexuality, the practices of the spiritual life, and being a mystic of the everyday. *Longing for the Holy* respects our traditional Catholic roots yet offers a strong but flexible approach to spirituality. And because God created each of us uniquely, each one’s approach to spirituality, to prayer, and to action will also be unique.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, whose classic





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works on spirituality, *The Holy Longing* and *The Shattered Lantern*, inspired this work. In these books, Fr. Rolheiser explores the spiritual implications of the Christian story for our spiritual development. Spirituality, Rolheiser suggests, is *what we do with our desire*. It concerns the way we channel the deep longing that is at the core of our beings. We all have such desire. The problem is we don't always know what to do with it. Much of the anguish of human existence is caused by human failure to appropriately identify and discipline that desire. As we progress in *Longing for the Holy*, we will see what components Rolheiser sees as necessary for a genuinely Christian spirituality that takes the love story of the triune God and humanity seriously.

We hope these sessions will help enrich our sense of the presence of God in our lives—in the personal, familial, work, civic, religious, and cultural arenas—and assist us in responding to God's presence with deep faith, expanding love, and a renewed commitment to justice.





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Before You Begin

Any practice of our faith, any prayer, worship, activity, or study, asks of us a certain attentiveness. We say we know God's love surrounds us at every moment of our lives, but we are busy people. We might find it hard to take the time to remember God's goodness to us in the past. We might find it difficult to sense God's presence with us in the present. In this, we are no different from generations of Christians before us. They knew, as we know, that some simple, straightforward help is necessary to become more attentive to our gracious and good God.

Like them, whenever we gather together, we prepare ourselves to become attentive. Part of this preparation is reading and reflecting on the upcoming session before the group gathers. So, each time you gather as a group to pray through the exercises in *Longing for the Holy*, you will engage in a little preparatory ritual that will help you to open your hearts and minds to God's voice, as God will speak to you.

First Gathering

At the first meeting when your group is seated, you will be invited to briefly introduce yourself. The leader can set the pace by first introducing herself or himself.

Sharing

**"How am I right now?" or
"What good news would I like to share?"**

You will be invited to share your response to one of the following questions, "How am I right now?" or "What good news would I like to share?" This should be a very brief but honest assessment of where you find yourself. "I'm tired; I've been taking care of my mother who's been having chemotherapy." Or, "I am





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so happy; our son has really improved his grades this semester.” Or, “I’m just glad to be here; we’ve been working a lot of over-time at the office.” There will be time to go into details informally later. It is enough to be mindful that God finds us where we *are* not where we think we *ought* to be.

Sharing the Good News

After the first session, you will have a chance to share with others how you incorporated the message of each session into your daily lives or how the Word of God challenged you into action for the week ahead.

Lifting Our Hearts ...

... in Song

Next, as part of your becoming attentive, you will be invited to listen to a piece of music or to sing a song. You may use the songs suggested in *Longing for the Holy* or you may choose music that has particular meaning for your group. Music allows us to become aware of the often-ignored parts of ourselves that can sense God’s presence.

... in the Quiet

In order to enter more deeply into the presence of God, you will be invited to quiet yourself, to, as it were, shake the dust of the day off your feet. Taking a few deep breaths and consciously letting go of any tension in your body may help to do this. Since the earliest days, the Christian community has valued silence not simply as the restful absence of sound, but as an important practice, as a way that we learn to really listen—to God, to each other, to our own hearts.



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... in the Word

Then, one of your group (choose a different person each session) will read aloud a passage from Scripture. Please read slowly. Read with the same attention and joy that you would give to a letter that has come from a family member or a beloved. The Scriptures are God's love letters to us. After the reading, pause for a time of silence to ponder the Word of God. Let God's Word speak to your heart.

... in Prayer

The group will conclude this section by offering together a closing prayer, opening hearts to communion with God. Keep in mind that the faith sharing that follows is also prayer, and is meant to help us grow in our union with Christ.

Our Companion on the Journey

Each of the reflections contains a quote from a wise Christian who has gone before us. These holy ones are a "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) who show us the many faces of holiness, the many ways Christ is visible in the world. The sense of being surrounded by a "cloud of witnesses"—the communion of saints—is a strong belief in our Catholic tradition. Saints are not plaster of Paris statues or generic holy people. Rather, they are, like us, unique individuals who struggled, each with his or her own gifts and weaknesses, to embody the Christ life in a different moment and place in history. They are companions who can encourage us to live fully in Christ in our own era and circumstances. May these holy ones be companions for you as you respond—in your own way—to that call.





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Encountering Wisdom for Life

Take some time to read and review the reflection you already prepared at home. This may be done either aloud or silently. When you are finished, pause to consider what you have read. You may want to reflect more on the lines or phrases you have underlined.

Sharing Our Faith

You will then begin your sharing about the questions in the session of *Longing for the Holy*. (You may have jotted down some of your responses previously.) One person may read the question aloud, and then leave time for others to respond. Please listen to each other with reverence, adhering to principles of confidentiality. This is the place to support and encourage one another, not make judgments about each other's spiritual life or ideas. Each of us is a beloved child of God. None of us is flawless. For this brief time, we listen to one another with God's compassionate love. Sharing yourself and being open to the sharing of others is a great gift each member of the group can offer.

Living the Good News

You will be invited to choose an action that emerges from the Word of God, the specific context of your life, and/or from your sharing. This should be your primary consideration. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. Suggested actions are listed.

Closing Prayer

When you have finished sharing your thoughts, you will pray together. Intercessory prayers—prayer for the concerns that weigh on your hearts—are appropriate, as are prayers of thanksgiving and praise.





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Looking Ahead

Just a reminder—Prepare at home for the following meeting by prayerfully reading and reflecting on the next session before you meet again.

Informal Gathering

Finally, if you plan to have some informal gathering, perhaps with snacks, this is the time to do that and a nice way to close your time together.

So, your time together, approximately two hours, would look something like this:

1. Sharing*	20 min.
“How am I feeling right now?” or “What good news would I like to share?”	
2. Lifting Our Hearts ...	20 min.
... in Song	
... in the Quiet	
... in the Word	
... in Prayer	
3. Our Companion on the Journey	5 min.
4. Encountering Wisdom for Life	10 min.
5. Sharing Our Faith	30 min.
6. Living the Good News	10 min.
7. Closing Prayer/Looking Ahead	10 min.
8. Informal Gathering	15 min.

*In Session 1, during the time for Sharing, briefly introduce yourself. You will begin Sharing the Good News during Session 2.





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Becoming accustomed to a simple pattern such as this frees us from always having to figure out what comes next. It allows us to simply sink into the deeper parts of ourselves and listen together with true attentiveness to God's gracious stirrings in our lives.

A Note for Small Community Leaders

Two songs are suggested for each session. The first is contained on the *Longing for the Holy* music CD. The second named song may be more familiar and can most likely be found in parish hymnals or missalettes.

