

SESSION ONE: SPIRITUAL YEARNING

A few basics for the course.

Formation or information?

This course will be experiential and will offer ways to pray during the week. We will seek to be formed, and transformed, by our times together, and not only to learn information and facts. To have a Christian education elective on spiritual formation without actually doing spiritual practices, without praying, would be like taking chemistry without the laboratory experiments! We will notice and name our experience of God. We will always be attentive to Christian beliefs and practices that nurture us.

At the core

This class is based on core truths that are summarized in these verses:

Acts 17:28 In God we live and move and have our being.

Isaiah 43:1 I have called you by name. You are mine. You are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you.

Group Exercise: Repeat the name of each person and say, “[Sandra], you are precious in God’s sight and honored, and God loves you.” Perhaps each person could say this for the person on their right, if they know one another’s names. How does it feel to hear this?

What is spirituality? What is the spiritual life?

“One Sunday night a middle aged layperson who had spent most of his adult life working professionally for an agency in his church wrote his pastor: *You saw me in church today as I usually am when I’m in town. I sang the hymns and prayed the responses, but I was just mouthing the words. I listened to the scriptures and the sermon, but nothing seemed to connect. It’s not the fault with your sermons, but the meaning just isn’t there anymore. When I try to pray on my own, it feels dry and empty...*Sincerely, R_____

After a time of no response, he invited his pastor to lunch. When still no mention was made of his letter he approached the subject: ‘I’m puzzled. I wrote and bared my soul to you, but you haven’t responded.’ ‘I know,’ the pastor confessed. ‘I sing the hymns and read the scriptures and preach the sermons and try to pray and it seems dry. And I’m a minister. I feel the same way and I didn’t know what to say.’” (from Active Spirituality – A Guide for Seekers and Ministers by Kent Ira Groff)

What do you think this story has to say about the spiritual life? Invite responses.

For a start at some basic definitions, we turn to Soul Feast, by Marjorie Thompson. But notice that it’s difficult to neatly define matters of spirituality. Because it is experiential, it’s hard to put it into words.