

To Live in God

REFLECTION GUIDE



DENNIS L. JOHNSON

To Live in God

Daily Reflections with
WALTER RAUSCHENBUSCH



REFLECTION GUIDE

*It has been my deepest satisfaction to get evidence now
and then that I have been able to help others
to a new spiritual birth...
a deeper repentance and a new experience of God's salvation.*

—Walter Rauschenbusch
(May 10, 1918 letter to Dr. Lemuel Call Barnes,
American Baptist Home Mission Society)



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JUDSON PRESS
PUBLISHERS SINCE 1824
VALLEY FORGE, PA



An Opening Word

This Reflection Guide is a companion resource for *To Live in God*, a collection of daily readings culled from the writing of Walter Rauschenbusch. The guide is designed for use by individuals and in small-group studies, and it may be helpful when a church chooses to use *To Live in God* for a congregation-wide journey of spiritual formation and discernment. While the book gathers 180 devotional readings with scripture and selected material from the writings of Rauschenbusch, this is not a discussion guide for each of the daily readings. The intent of this guide is to provide an overall approach that can be used in personal or group reflection to help deepen inward communion with God and outward obedience to God in the spirit and image of Jesus Christ.

Begin Where You Are

The questions asked in this guide are for your own self-examination and can help direct thoughts and observations for recording in a journal, which is a valuable way to chronicle your spiritual formation and growth along with your theological reflections and faith questions. Before you begin, the first questions to ponder are:

When you examine your life at this time, how do you describe it?

What adjective(s) would you choose to fill the blank: "I am living a _____ life"?

Are you content to have the rest of your life remain as you describe it today? Why or why not?



What Is the Blessed Life?

We often say, "I am blessed." "I have been blessed." "My life is blessed."

In your experience, what is usually meant by such expressions of being blessed? Is blessed a word to define your life today?

Take some time to read Rauschenbusch's description of the Blessed Life (p. xi). Don't analyze or debate it. Simply read his words slowly and prayerfully, paying attention to your response.

Read the text a second time and insert *Jesus* as the subject who is living the Blessed Life. The passage would read like this:

Jesus has God and lives in God and has God living in him. *Jesus* thinks God's thoughts, loves what God loves and hates what God hates. *Jesus* realizes God's presence. *Jesus* feels God's holiness and wills to be holy because God is holy. *Jesus* feels God's goodness in every blessing of his life and even in its tribulations. *Jesus* is happy and trustful. *Jesus* joins in the great purposes of God and is lifted to greatness of vision and faith and hope with God. *Jesus* lives the blessed life.

Would you say this rings true as the Jesus-life? In what ways might this be read as a commentary on the life Jesus lived and the divine revelation of the abundant life he makes visible and available? Would you affirm this as the Christlike life, the Spirit-filled life? Why or why not?

Now give the passage a third reading. This time insert *your name* instead of the name of Jesus.

What is your reaction? Would you say this rings true for your life? As a commentary on you and your life, how does it sound? How does it feel?

How ready are you to explore the growing edges to live in God and have God live in you and to join the great purposes of God? Are you prepared to be conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others? What, if anything, holds you back?



Three Facets of One Journey

To live in God is a journey. The journey on which Rauschenbusch guides us is one of loving God and all of God’s creation, including each person we meet along the way. As indicated in the book’s Introduction, this journey has three dimensions:

The Inward Journey of Solitude (pp. 1-62)

This section turns your attention to “the quiet, gentle elements of spiritual communion, to a secret walk with God” (p. 2), to “entering into the secret of God’s presence” (p. 3), “dwelling in the ripening sunshine of God, opening your soul to the Infinite and Eternal,” to “the practice of the presence of God” (p. 35).

The Outward Journey of Service (pp. 63-126)

Attention is turned from self to service and seeking first the kingdom of God. Rauschenbusch will press you to ask yourself, “In what way does my daily work in any sense aid the kingdom, serve God and bless humanity?” (p. 70). Answering that question will mark the difference between serving self and serving God.

The Common Journey of Solidarity (pp. 127-194)

To be fully Christlike, your attention must also be on standing for the solidarity of humanity and embracing the common good. God created us for one another, and we need each other. Dwelling on the reflections in this section is intended to deepen your awareness that “Jesus put love as the central law of life, both in religion and ethics,” and that “love is the social instinct which binds people together and makes them indispensable to one another. Whoever demands love, demands solidarity” (p. 147).

Time Alone: A Formative Pattern

The daily pattern for each reading is to prepare, to ponder, to pray, and to practice. Your heart is prepared by dwelling contemplatively in the words of scripture. Your mind pauses to ponder reflectively the words of Rauschenbusch. Your soul opens to pray afresh the prayers first offered by Rauschenbusch over a century ago. Your will and strength resolve to practice loyally and lovingly what God is calling you to be and do. Prepare. Ponder. Pray. Practice.

While that is the pattern for each reflection, you will need to establish a plan, a rhythm, for your daily reading. There is no right or wrong, proper or improper reading plan. The initial inclination likely will be to begin at page 1 and work your way to the last page over a six-month period. A friend who is 95 years old told me that when he began using the book, he was so stimulated by the readings each day that he kept wanting to flip ahead, deeper into the book, and he had to control himself to stay in place. My response was that, at age 95, he should feel free to flip ahead as fast and as far as he wants!

One daily rhythm to consider would be to blend the inward, the outward, and the common journeys each week, with Sunday being sabbath time for worship and rest.

Monday:	Inward
Tuesday:	Outward
Wednesday:	Common
Thursday:	Inward
Friday:	Outward
Saturday:	Common

Or maybe you are at a point where you sense for some reason you need to spend more extended time and focused attention on one facet of the journey at

a time, rather than blending the three. Your personal preference may be for the inward (being a contemplative spirit), but perhaps what you need in your spiritual formation at this time is more of the outward facing journey, for the active life of faith. Or, perhaps you tend to be individualistic in terms of understanding the gospel and acknowledge a need to be stretched on the common journey of solidarity. Another possibility is that you are inclined to a less structured rhythm and a more meandering path through the book. You randomly choose your reflection for each day.

To extend the daily reflections with Rauschenbusch to full year's study, you can move through the book with one 6-month plan and then follow a different rhythm for the second 6 months of the year.

Do keep in mind that particular readings may need more than one day to fully digest. Spend as much time and as many days as you need to allow those words to complete their formative work on you. Move on when you have extracted all the nourishment you can gain in feeding on the Word and words that day. The goal is to dig deeper (formational reading), not skim the surface to cover a lot of ground (informational reading). The *quality* of your reflection is more important than the *quantity* of reflections you cover over time. Don't let the calendar control the process. Let the Spirit guide your pace.

Also, be aware that the plan and rhythm you adopt reveals something valuable and insightful to you and about you.

*If you prefer a structured plan, why is that?
Do you resist the unstructured? Why?
Do you prefer roaming around and refuse
to go along with structure? Why is that?*

Again, the book is not designed with a right or wrong reading plan in mind. Choose the rhythm

you need at this point in your walk with God. That may mean choosing a comfortable plan to follow. Sometimes we need a likeable structure and a sense of resonance and harmony. Other times resistance and dissonance are where God calls our attention to be in order to smooth off our rough spots. So, an uncomfortable plan may be what is needed.

And be prepared that paying attention to your reading plan is a foretaste of what you will experience with the words of scripture and the reflections of Rauschenbusch! With some readings, you will resonate and find comfort. Others will challenge and discomfort you. You will warm to some and be troubled by others. Both experiences are valuable, and each will shape you more in the image of Christ when you read for spiritual formation.



Time Alone: Formational Reading

Rauschenbusch said that one of the ways we form spiritually is by “wisely and constantly drawing on the great storehouse of the past for spiritual sustenance and wisdom” (p. 36). For Rauschenbusch, the great storehouse of the past included devotional literature, theology, church history, and biographies, with the primary storehouse, of course, being the Bible. We gain spiritual sustenance and wisdom not simply by *what* we read from the storehouse but more importantly by *how* we read. Spiritual formation is cultivated by formational reading.

Our common approach to what we read is information oriented, which dominates our entire educational system. We are taught to read for information. Spiritual formation has a different reading orientation and method. The desirable approach to the daily readings in *To Live in God* is that you practice formational reading.

R E F L E C T I O N G U I D E

Formational reading is a spiritual way of reading in which the listening heart of the reader encounters words in the text to direct us, instead of our thoughts directing the texts. Susan Annette Muto offers this contrast between formative and informative reading:

Formative reading means ... being receptive to those directives in the text that touch our heart and evoke inner longings to receive God's word at the center of our life.... Formative reading thus involves a shift... from "form-giving," in which we are inclined to impose our meaning on the text, to "form-receiving," in which we let its meaning influence us. We move from mainly argumentative, rationalistic, fault-finding mentality to an appreciative, meditative, confirming mood. Our spiritual life is refreshed whenever we take time to savor these timely values. They become a living part of who we are. The text is like a bridge between the limits of our life here and now and the possibilities awaiting us if we open our minds and hearts to God.¹

Such a formative way of reading is an approach to scripture which can also be applied to our reading of other rich material, as Rauschenbusch encouraged and whose writings are now part of "the great storehouse of the past." Formative reading with the eyes of the heart opens us up to be spiritually shaped with "sustenance and wisdom."

Each day formative reading is prayerful reading. As you enter your time alone for reflection:

- Go to a quiet place to meet God and be met by God.
- Spend time in silence, letting go of anything that would keep you from listening with your mind in your heart.

- Enter the time with a willingness to let the words read you more than you read the words. Let the texts control you rather than you try to control the texts. Let yourself be shaped by the words into Christ's likeness rather than trying to shape the words to your likeness.

- If your mind wanders at any time, don't get frustrated. Notice to where it wanders. Our minds do not wander arbitrarily. Minds wander purposefully to a burden, a desire, a hope, a concern. Sometimes the burden is significant; sometimes it becomes a matter of prayer.

- Read the scripture text and Rauschenbusch passage slowly and carefully, perhaps aloud, first to get an overall sense of what is being said. This is reverent reading for understanding and becoming attentive.

- Read the texts a second time meditatively, mulling over the words, allowing your thoughts to settle on and dwell on certain phrases or particular words that have special meaning to you, attract your curiosity, or catch your imagination. This is receptive reading for illumination and being led.

- Read the texts a third time even more slowly and meditatively, and then ask yourself some questions. This is reflective reading for formation and being shaped.



Time Alone: Formative Questions

During the preparing and pondering phases of your reading, ask: "As I listen..."

How is my life being touched right now?

What am I being told about God, about Jesus, about the Spirit, about the church, about society, about human beings, about others, about myself?

With what am I resonating or what am I resisting, and why? What comforts me or what bothers me, and why?

*What am I being called to be or become or do?
How am I to be a sign and servant of the kingdom/reign of God?*

What encouragement or invitation is here, not so much for some long-term project but for something I might do or be in the next day or so?



Time Alone: Formative Prayer

After you clarify what the texts are inviting you to be or do, resolve to put that invitation into practice. Close your time alone by praying, aloud or silently, the prayer by Rauschenbusch provided with each day's reflection. You may wish to add your own words to his prayer from more than a century ago, asking for God to help you embrace the invitation you have received, and to put into practice fully, freely, and fearlessly the insights you have gleaned.

Each day with each reading, remember to prepare, ponder, pray, and practice.



Time Together:

A Circle of Spiritual Companions

To live in God requires time alone and time together, a balance that Rauschenbusch displayed in his own spiritual formation. He clearly bore witness to the formative importance of communal life when he took the initiative during his Hell's Kitchen pastorate in 1887 to meet weekly with two friends, Leighton Williams, pastor of the Amity Baptist Church, and Nathaniel Schmidt, pastor of the Swedish Baptist Church. They gathered each Sunday afternoon to focus on the practice of inward spiritual disciplines of reflection, contemplation, and prayer, followed by sharing in Communion.

"I remember with special joy the communion services," Rauschenbusch wrote. "A tranquil spirit of reverence and contemplation, a deep reverence toward our Lord, a sense of his real presence, and unusual joy in Christian fellowship invited the soul to rest and true prayer." Winthrop Hudson records, "Through the discipline of weekly study, discussion, mutual criticism, and common worship they sought to clarify their thinking, deepen their devotion, and chart a course by which they might exert a united influence."² Reflecting familiarity with Ignatius of Loyola and Jesuit spirituality, the three Baptists proclaimed themselves to be a new little "Society of Jesus."

With *To Live in God* as your reflective material, form a Circle of Spiritual Companions (CSC), a small group of between two to six people, committed to practicing the daily reflections in time alone, and then coming together to share your experiences with the readings and to encourage one another in the process of becoming more Christlike.

My recommendation is to gather twice a month for six months. Depending on the size of your group, the time together may range from 60 to 120 minutes. Obviously, a group of two will require less time than a group of six. Together agree upon the rhythm for your daily readings; while undertaking the discipline individually, you will want to read the meditations in the same order! (Review the options given above in "Time Alone.")

There are important expectations and healthy habits to be observed by a Circle of Spiritual Companions to establish safe space which nurtures spiritual growth and allows everyone to be real, open, and honest.

Bring 100 percent of yourself. Come with all of who you are and offer yourself fully to your spiritual companions when stories and experiences are shared.

R E F L E C T I O N G U I D E

Expect grace and exhibit grace. Come expecting to be welcomed and respected. Come willing to extend welcome and respect to each person in the group.

Observe confidentiality. For trust to develop and be sustained, what is shared in the group must be held in strict confidence by all. As trust deepens, sharing deepens.

No fixing, no setting each other straight, no counseling, no advising, no saving, no rescuing. No “Something like that happened to me once and here’s what I did.” It’s not about you when you are truly listening to another person’s story. Be willing to affirm, to care, to encourage, to lift up one another. Leave the saving to the Spirit.

Be intentionally focused and attentive. Listen deeply to other members of the group. Interact with one another thoughtfully, supportively, empathically. Avoid preparing your response while another is sharing.

Share the air. No single voice should dominate the gathering. Be attentive to how much group time you take either when sharing or when responding.

Speak for yourself. Share from your own life and experience, and reflect on your own faith. You don’t need to represent anyone else but you.

Listen to silence. It is not a sign of failure if no one speaks. It is a precious gift in our noisy world! Allow silence to be a member of the group. Silence is time for listening to the Spirit, our inward Comforter, Guide, Teacher, Light.

Be open to being touched by the Spirit. Trust you will emerge from this experience refreshed, surprised, and more fully formed in the image of Christ.

A CSC group does not have a leader. Someone is asked by the group to serve as the convener, who reminds group members of upcoming meetings and takes on a facilitator role for the gathering. Responsibilities may include leading the group in

the opening unison reading and silence, protecting the atmosphere of prayerful listening for the group, watching the time to ensure each participant has a chance to share, and guiding the closing silence and some reflection on the session. (See below for more details about the meeting format.) The same person may be the convener for each session, or the group may choose to rotate the role from meeting to meeting so each participant has the opportunity to serve (and so no one has responsibility every time).

How do we spend our time together as a Circle of Spiritual Companions? The format for a CSC group is simple:

CENTERING (5 minutes)

The convener lights a candle to represent the presence of Christ and asks the group to read in unison “The Blessed Life” (*To Live in God*, xi). After the reading the group settles in a worshipful silence.

SHARING (up to 15 minutes)

Moving out of the silence, the convener asks each person to take a turn sharing what experiences, insights, thoughts, challenges they discovered through the scripture and Rauschenbusch readings from the past two weeks. This time of sharing has three parts: speaking, listening, and responding.

Speaking. In turn, each participant may respond to one or more of the following questions, speaking uninterrupted for between 5 and 10 minutes:

In the scripture and readings, with what did you resonate? What did you resist?

What has God been leading you to explore, to understand, to experience at this point in time?

Where is God in your life now, today?

What have you resolved to become or do as a result of your daily reflections?

Listening. While one person is speaking, the other members are listening, entirely attentive to and fo-

cused on what is being expressed. When the speaker finishes sharing, enter a time of prayerful silence and reflection (1-2 minutes).

Responding. The convener breaks the silence and, for the next 5 minutes, invites the rest of the group to briefly give encouragement, care, and affirmation to the speaker. The members may also wish to ask questions to clarify something the speaker shared—not for discussion or disagreement, only to better understand. This is also a time for members to share insights gained during the presentation and silent reflection times.

After this brief period of responding, the group returns to silence (1-2 minutes) to pray for the speaker and await the next person to share after the convener breaks the silence.

REPEAT the **Speaking, Listening/Silence, and Responding** cycle for each person in turn.

REVIEWING (up to 10 minutes)

After all have had a chance to share, if time permits, the convener may ask the group to review how the time together went and to make suggestions or raise concerns about the process. If the group wishes to rotate the convener task, identify who will serve in that role for the next meeting.

CLOSING (5 minutes)

The group returns to worshipful silence. At the end of the silence the convener may choose to close by reading a Rauschenbusch prayer from one of the past two weeks readings.

Walking the spiritual path in the company of others tends to cultivate meaningful relationships that endure for years to come, and not only contributes to the spiritual formation and wholeness of the individual, but also can enhance the vitality and health of a congregation.



Congregational Time Together

When a congregation enters into a period of spiritual formation and discernment, *To Live in God* provides a structured resource for nurturing personal spiritual growth, strengthening bonds of fellowship, and discerning where God is calling individuals and the congregation to be more incarnational of the Christ-spirit on earth, more instrumental for the kingdom of God, and more intentional about human solidarity. The design of Time Alone and Time Together can be adapted creatively to a congregation's identity, setting, programs, and process. And the Time Alone pattern and Time Together format continue to be followed as described earlier.

Since this would be a spiritual focus for the congregation, reflection questions relevant to the faith community should be added to those already included for reflection in personal and group time.

What is being said to our church, about our church, for our church?

What is God calling us to be or do as “the incarnation of the Christ-spirit on earth?”

What would it look like and what shape would it take for your church, your spiritual community, your fellowship of saints, to devote an extended period of time to the inward journey of solitude, the outward journey of service, and the common journey of solidarity? Here are three possible routes for congregational journeys:



What the Spirit Is Saying to the Church: A Journey for Ordinary Time

Rauschenbusch said the Christian church
“will sicken and die of old age”

R E F L E C T I O N G U I D E

if she shrinks from her burden and quenches the Spirit which is plainly speaking to her soul.”

Use *To Live in God* during the long liturgical season following Pentecost, what some traditions in the Christian church call Ordinary Time. Ideally the experience would be a 6-month journey with weekly or biweekly group gatherings; however, that timetable may be shortened or lengthened if necessary, to meet the congregation's needs and fit the church calendar.

Participants commit to personal devotional reading in time alone each day and then spend time together for small-group reflection and sharing. Time together as church leadership, as ministry teams, as boards and committees, as Bible study groups, as books groups, as educational hour classes, as vocational support groups, and other small-group gatherings can be formative experiences to live in God more intentionally as a spiritual community, more incarnationally in society, and more interconnectedly with all God's creation.



Christianizing the Church: A 30-Day Congregational Journey

Rauschenbusch said, *“The question is how intensively Christian the Church can make its members. That will depend on the question how Christian the Church itself is, and there's the rub.”*

This journey is 24 days of personal devotional reading and 4 Sundays of small-group gatherings. The daily reading plan outlined here features selections related specifically to the Christian church.

Week 1

Real Worship, 10
Second-hand Religion, 56
In Times of Doubt, 58
Least Wanting to Hear, 66
Essence of Baptist Faith, 75
Perpetual Reformation of the Church, 77
Sunday Circle of Spiritual Companions (CSC)

Week 2

Churchly Christianity, 84
The Church Is an Agent, Not an End, 85
Social Transformation Now, 86
The Test of the Church, 94
The Purpose of the Church, 99
Forming Christian Revolutionists, 107
Sunday CSC

Week 3

The Church's Orientation, 108
Beyond Theology and the Bible, 113
Not about the Church, 114
The Incarnational Church, 136
All Life Filled with Divine Purpose, 140
Social Evil and Social Salvation, 153
Sunday CSC

Week 4

The Begetting Church, 160
The Charismatic Life of the Church, 162
Mummery Churches, 183
The Salvation of the Church, 184
The Church Must Be Liberated, 185
The Charge of Hypocrisy, 189
Sunday CSC



**The Way of the Cross:
A Congregational Lenten Journey**

Rauschenbusch said, “*It takes great faith to believe that the Church will gain life by losing life.... (The) law of the Cross is the supreme law of the Church.*”

This journey takes place during the 40 days of Lent, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending Holy Saturday. Sundays are not included in the 40 days but will be used for Spiritual Companions Group gatherings. The selected sequence of daily readings is:

First Week of Lent

(Ash Wednesday) Know the Devil, 87
A Downward Sag, 6
Remove the Obstacles, 7
The Culminating Revelation of God, 13
Sunday Circle of Spiritual Companions (CSC)

Second Week of Lent

Dying Piecemeal, 14
The Trembling Compass-Needle, Pointing to Eternity, 22
Being Saved, 31
God Has Borne Our Sins, 32
That Kind of God, 33
From Sin to Salvation, 39
Sunday CSC

Third Week of Lent

Being and Doing, 57
The Inward and Outward, 64
The Question to Ask Yourself, 70
Love at the Center, 73
Fellowship of Redemptive Love, 80

What God Wants, 81
Sunday CSC

Fourth Week of Lent

Confronting the Causes of Misery, 89
Goodness That Wakes the Devil, 90
The Irrepressible Conflict, 95
Only Love Disarms, 96
The Most Poignant Consciousness of Sin, 98
The Great Intensifier of Life, 101
Sunday CSC

Fifth Week of Lent

No Love, No Christian, 118
Being Made New, 123
The Greatest of These, 124
We Need Each Other, 126
The Magic and Mythology of War, 137
Lies Dressed Up in Truth, 138
Sunday CSC

Sixth Week of Lent

Anthropocentric Mysticism, 145
The Kingdom of God, 156
The Kingdom of Evil, 158
The Sin Borne by Jesus, 165
Bound Together with Love, 166
Jesus of the Common People, 130
Sunday CSC (Palm/Passion Sunday)

Holy Week

The Only True Life, 131
The Mob Spirit, 163
Maddening and Disarming Silence, 100
The Lord’s Supper and
Our Supreme Allegiance, 29
Jesus and His Enemies, 177
The Church Must Be Liberated, 185
Easter Sunday CSC



A Closing Word

As expressed in the book's Preface, the hope is that *To Live in God* will usher your heart into a deeper sense of God's presence within you, a growing attentiveness to God's presence and activity in the world beyond you, and a fresher encounter with and experience of Jesus Christ that will spiritually form you in his image, with Walter Rauschenbusch as your spiritual director or guide for the journey. This Reflection Guide is offered for mapping your time alone in personal devotion and time together in reflective conversation.

*Do thou reward thy servants
with a glad sense of their own eternal worth
and in the heat of the day
do thou show them the spring by the way-
side
that flows from the eternal silence of God
and gives new light to the eyes of all who
drink of it.*

Walter Rauschenbusch
Servant of God and Our Brother in Christ

Notes:

1. Susan Annette Muto, *Pathways of Spiritual Living* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1984), 65, 66.
2. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Writings* (Winthrop Hudson, editor), 12, 18.