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the way you experience God, and the way you live."

James Martin, SJ, author of *My Life with the Saints*



THE IGNATIAN ADVENTURE



Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises
of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life

KEVIN O'BRIEN, SJ

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For Mom, Dad, Cathy, and Andy,
and for my family in the Society of Jesus

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam
“For the Greater Glory of God”

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Beginning

EVERY ADVENTURE HAS A BEGINNING. Great adventures often have the most unexpected beginnings. For me, the adventure that would lead me to become a Jesuit and to write this guide to prayer began on a hot day outside a courthouse in southern Florida, in the company of an eighty-year-old Jewish woman from Brooklyn.

I was a junior lawyer working on a big probate case involving some tragic family history and lots of land in Palm Beach County. The stakes were high, and the facts were deeply personal for my client, Miriam. She was immensely kind and gracious. At this stage of her life, the last place she wanted to be was in a courtroom, in a long, drawn-out fight over a will. But she knew that it was the right thing to do for her beloved, whose will we were trying to defend.

As the junior lawyer, my job mostly was to care for the personal needs of the client. During the court hearings recounting some of the painful family history, Miriam sometimes would leave the courtroom, and I would walk with her. She would tell me stories about her beloved and about growing up in Brooklyn. She would tell me about her hopes for her future. One day, as we walked outside the courthouse, the sun beating down on us, it hit me: *I would rather be outside talking with Miriam than inside the courtroom.* There was no blinding light, no thunderbolt from heaven, just an insight that cut to the heart of the matter.

The thought was not entirely new. I went to law school not intending to practice law but to lay the foundation for a career in

politics. From an early age, my family and my faith taught me that, whatever I did in life, I needed to give back to the community. The gospel truth became a part of me; to whom much is given, much is expected. Tied up in this noble ambition was a lot of youthful ambition. Admittedly, public service fed my ego and my desire for power and prestige. But God works with our mixed motivations, refining ambitions that are too self-directed.

So I knew that practicing law would not be for the long term. What I did not know then was that my way of serving and giving back would be as a Jesuit priest, not as a public servant. Raised in an Irish Catholic family, with twelve years of Catholic education behind me, I had at times thought about becoming a priest, most seriously while at Georgetown, where I attended college. But my interest in the Jesuits then was more about my esteem for the Jesuits I met there than about a personal sense of calling. In short, lots of seeds had been planted earlier in my life; they just needed the proper watering.

That day with Miriam outside the courthouse was a moment when my patient and gently persistent God broke through my cluttered thinking and clearly got my attention. What that insight did was stir up a visceral gut check in me. I needed to pay attention and figure out what I really wanted to do with my life, concerns that are common among twenty-six-year-olds, like myself then. I talked more pointedly with friends and mentors who knew me well; I started to pray more regularly, inviting God into the conversation about what I should do with my life. Thoughts about becoming a priest reemerged naturally.

The lawyer in me wanted to figure it out quickly and cut to the chase. So I approached a seasoned spiritual director and matter-of-factly (and somewhat arrogantly) stated, "I'd like for you to help me figure out if I should be a Jesuit priest." She astutely put me in my place, saying to me in her Irish brogue, "Well, now, let's put that question aside for a time. Tell me, who is God for you?" I was at a loss for words. We spent about a year trying to come up with an answer to that initial, and crucial, question.

God has a way of getting our attention and sending the right people to us at the right times. The problem is that we often don't realize it at the moment. Fortunately, I was picking up on God's cues. About the same time as my graced conversation with Miriam, I was talking with the principal of our local Catholic high school and my alma mater, Cardinal Newman High School, in West Palm Beach. After an advisory board meeting one evening, Colleen, who had known me as a student some years before, asked me, "Have you ever thought about teaching?" The truth was that I had thought about teaching over the years, having tutored in college and served as a teaching assistant in law school. But my initial answer was the expected one: "Thanks, that's very kind, but I'm developing a law practice and I'm building this career in politics, and . . ."

Coupled with my insight outside the courthouse, Colleen's question continued to intrigue me. Within a few weeks, I accepted her offer. Whenever I thought about teaching, I experienced a deep-seated enthusiasm, and my imagination was stirred with all sorts of possibilities. Practicing law, though a good and noble profession, did not summon the same bold, deep desires. The partners at my law firm offered, "Take a year off. We'll save a place for you." Some thought I'd come back. Those who knew me best realized I was beginning another adventure that would take me away from the practice of law.

For three years, I taught history, political science, economics, and religion at Cardinal Newman. I coached girls' soccer. I started a retreat program. I loved it. I found a passion and a joy in my work that I had not experienced anywhere else. I felt alive, and the people around me saw that. The environment of the high school was fertile ground for my consideration of a vocation to the priesthood. My work and my students helped me realize my vocation as a priest, and the most natural place for me to live that priesthood was as a Jesuit.

The Jesuits whom I had known were talented, energetic, smart, funny, committed men. They lived joy-filled lives. They preached, taught, and discussed the loftiest and most inspiring ideas, yet they

also lived very much with their feet firmly set on the ground. They practiced a spirituality that was deeply rooted in the world, finding God in all things, meeting people right where they were, and responding to the most pressing needs of our time. They committed themselves to a faith that does justice, caring and advocating for the most vulnerable people in our world. They did not hesitate to go to the frontiers where the church meets the world and the world meets the church, bringing the gospel to new conversations and environments in a variety of cultures and religions.

The Jesuits were men of passion. They promised me a life of adventure, not simply of the geographic kind (I *have* moved around a lot) but one leading me to the most important destination of all: to the heart of God, which fills the hearts of all people. My guidebook in this great adventure has been the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which is what this book is all about. The genius and beauty of the Exercises is that we learn to weave our own life narrative into the life story of Jesus Christ in such a way that both become more vivid and interconnected. The Spiritual Exercises have helped me become more aware of how God has guided me in the past, how God labors in my life in the present and calls me in the future. The Exercises do this by helping me become freer of all the interior clutter that gets in the way of reaching this graced awareness.

There is another story that animates the Exercises but that never gets in the way of the more important encounter between the person and Jesus Christ. It is the story of Ignatius of Loyola, who will serve as our able guide, pointing us in the right direction and equipping us with what we need for the journey. As a young man, Ignatius dreamed of a life of adventure. Along the way, he crafted the Exercises as a testament of grace, a record of his own encounter with the living God, which he shared—with more and more people. His adventure had a beginning—and like all great adventures, its beginning was most unexpected.

The Journey of Ignatius of Loyola

IÑIGO LÓPEZ DE LOYOLA Y Oñaz was born in 1491, the thirteenth child in a family of minor nobility. Like other boys coming of age at that time, Iñigo imagined himself as one of the knights he read about in the romantic novels of his era: cultured, pious, skilled in warfare, and irresistible to ladies-in-waiting.

The times fermented the idealism and passion that were in his Basque blood. It was an age for adventurers of all kinds: merchants crisscrossing continents and seas in search of new wealth; explorers setting out on expeditions to unknown worlds; writers, artists, and scientists inspiring a rebirth in learning that would expand the reaches of the mind and culture. In his youth, Iñigo could not have imagined the very different kind of adventure that God had in store for him.

The Young Knight

Iñigo's family connections helped secure him a position serving as a page to the treasurer of the kingdom of Castile. So he left his native Loyola at the age of sixteen for a life at court. The upwardly mobile Iñigo easily fit into his new role: riding, dueling, gambling, dancing, and romancing young ladies. Though short in stature, he got involved in some noteworthy brawls, one of which resulted in charges being filed against him.

When he was twenty-six, Iñigo took up the life of a soldier in the northern town of Pamplona. Ever loyal, Iñigo did not

hesitate to come to the Crown's defense when in 1521 the French attacked Pamplona. It was a lost battle from the start, with Iñigo's small band of soldiers easily outnumbered. As a matter of honor, Iñigo refused to give up the town fortress. Through the walls of the citadel crashed a cannonball, which struck Iñigo in the legs. Impressed by Iñigo's courage, the French soldiers tended to his wounds and carried him back to Loyola, where doctors reset his legs. He almost died from an infection related to the injury.

As with his loyalty and honor, Iñigo's vanity ran deep. After his legs were rebroken and had begun to heal, he noticed that his right leg was shorter than his left and that there was an unsightly protrusion of the bone. He worried that these deformities would spell the end of his knightly life. He fretted over not being able to wear the flashy, tight-fitting clothing of a courtier. So he had his doctors break and reset his limb again, saw off the bump on his leg, and stretch his shorter leg in a racklike instrument. The pain was excruciating but, in his worldly estimation, worth it.

For six months, the restless Iñigo convalesced. To pass the time, he asked his caregiver for some novels of chivalry to read, but all she could find were a popular version of the life of Christ and a collection of tales of saints. As he read and pondered these books, he noticed a change taking place within him. Daydreams of serving the king as a valiant knight and winning the love of a noble lady, though at first enticing, ultimately left him feeling inwardly dry and discontented. By contrast, when he imagined devoting his life to the service of God and others, as had the saints he was reading about, Iñigo experienced a deep sense of joy. In his autobiography, written in the third person and dictated to a fellow Jesuit near the end of his life, Ignatius writes:

When he thought of worldly matters, he found much delight; but after growing weary and dismissing them, he found that he was dry and unhappy. But when he thought of . . . imitating the saints in all the austerities they practiced, he not only found consolation in

these thoughts, but even after they had left him he remained happy and joyful. (*Autobiography*, no. 8)

God was stirring up something new in our young knight. Ignatius became convinced that God was speaking to him through his interior attractions and reactions.

The Pilgrim

Iñigo wisely wanted to test what these unfamiliar desires and dreams were all about. So once he recovered from his injuries, he set out on a new adventure, intending to go to Jerusalem as a pilgrim. He left behind his stately family home and traveled widely—begging, preaching, and caring for the sick and poor. One of his first stops was a Benedictine mountaintop shrine of Our Lady at Montserrat. There, after an all-night vigil, the young romantic left behind his sword before the altar of Our Lady and donned the sackcloth of a beggar. With a pilgrim's staff in hand, Iñigo gave his courtly robe and feathered cap to a beggar.

From Montserrat he set out for the small town of Manresa. Iñigo stayed there for about ten months, spending hours every day in solitary prayer and working at a hospice. Later in his life, he reflected that during this time, God worked on him like a teacher instructing a student, gently schooling him in the ways of prayer and holiness. At Manresa, Iñigo discerned carefully the interior movements of his soul: the attractions, feelings, thoughts, and desires that led him to greater intimacy with Jesus Christ and those that were distractions to his spiritual growth. Trying to outdo the piety of the saints he read about, he engaged in severe bodily penances. At times, he became mired in self-doubt. Through prayer and wise spiritual guidance, Iñigo discerned that his seemingly pious acts were really displays of vanity. As he sought a more balanced spiritual life, he encountered a God who was not a tyrant waiting for him to slip up but a helping God who wanted for him the fullness of life.

At Manresa, Iñigo enjoyed the first of several mystical visions that would mark his life. Sitting by the river Cardoner, he experienced an enlightenment that allowed him to see the world with new eyes and to find God in all things. In his autobiography, the pilgrim saint remarked that he learned more about God and the world in that one moment than he did throughout the rest of his life.

Iñigo began to make notes of his spiritual insights. He talked to people about the spiritual life whenever and wherever he could and recorded the fruit of these conversations. Those notes became the basis for a manual of prayer that he would later title the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The pilgrim begged his way to Jerusalem in 1523. Iñigo intended to spend the rest of his life in the region where Jesus had lived and labored. However, because of the dangerous political situation in the Holy Land at the time, the Franciscan guardians of the sacred sites ordered him to leave after only a few weeks. His romantic hopes of spending his life in the Holy Land dashed, Iñigo faced a moment of decision: how was he to serve God? He writes, again in the third person:

After the said pilgrim came to realize that it was God's will that he not remain in Jerusalem, he kept wondering what he ought to do, and finally he was inclined toward spending some time in studies in order to help souls; and so he decided to go to Barcelona. (*Autobiography*, no. 50)

Underlying this succinct, matter-of-fact account are some profound spiritual insights. Iñigo was learning that he had to be flexible in responding to God's will in his life. And his decisions had to be directed toward "helping souls," or helping people, which he could do in many ways, all depending on the circumstances he faced.

The Student

Once back in Spain, Iñigo decided to begin studies for the priesthood, but he lacked knowledge of Latin, the language of the church. So at the age of thirty-three, he spent two years in Barcelona, studying alongside schoolchildren. Iñigo subsequently attended universities in Alcalá and Salamanca, but his education was self-directed and haphazard. In these university towns, he continued to preach, teach, and offer his Spiritual Exercises. He was arrested several times by the Spanish Inquisition, which questioned his credentials and carefully examined the Spiritual Exercises for heresy. The authorities limited Iñigo's ability to teach and preach, but they did not condemn the Spiritual Exercises.

Lacking formal academic training and wanting to become a better teacher and preacher, Iñigo traveled to the renowned University of Paris to study philosophy and theology. There he became known as "Ignatius," a Latin form of his name. In Paris, he met other students, such as Francis Xavier and Peter Faber, who were captivated by Ignatius's experience of God, his vision of the world, and his adventurous spirit.

On August 15, 1534, in a small chapel on Montmartre, the "hill of martyrs," in Paris, Ignatius and six other men professed religious vows of poverty and chastity to bind them more closely together. They also vowed to travel to the Holy Land after completing their studies for the priesthood. If, after a year, passage proved impractical, they promised to offer their services to the pope instead.

The Founder

The companions, now eleven in number, met in Venice and preached, worked in hospitals, and gave the Exercises. While waiting for passage to Jerusalem, Ignatius and those others who were not yet priests were ordained in 1537. Unable to go to the Holy

Land because Venice was at war with the Ottoman Empire, these “friends in the Lord,” as they called themselves, set out for Rome as they had vowed.

Along the way, near Rome, in a chapel in the small village of La Storta, Ignatius enjoyed another mystical vision, in which he saw God the Father with Jesus, the Son, carrying his cross. Ignatius heard the Father say, “I will be favorable to you in Rome.” In the vision, Ignatius had a clear sense of being called to serve alongside Jesus.

When they settled in Rome, the companions deliberated for many weeks about their future, all the while teaching, preaching, and performing works of mercy. They eventually decided to form a religious order under a vow of obedience to a superior. Ignatius was their unanimous choice.

Inspired by the vision at La Storta, Ignatius insisted that they call themselves the Company (or Society) of Jesus. They dared to take the name of Jesus (which no other religious order had done) for the simple reason that knowing, loving, and serving Jesus Christ was the inspiration and end of their mission together. They wanted to be companions of Jesus carrying his cross.

The Jesuits, as the companions soon would be called, vowed to go wherever the church’s needs were greatest and wherever they could help more souls. Unlike monastic religious orders, their home would be the road. The Jesuits would meet people where they were rather than insist that people come to a monastery or a church. They offered the church a spirituality that was both mystical and practical; they would be “contemplatives in action,” as the first generation of Jesuits described themselves.

When their religious order was formally constituted in 1540, the pope began to depend on the Jesuits for important missions throughout the world. Xavier set sail for India. Faber and his fellow theologians were assigned to participate in the Council of Trent. Jesuits opened schools all over Europe and across the seas to meet the church’s great desire for an educated clergy and faithful. Ignatius and his Jesuits chose as their motto *Ad Majorem Dei*

Gloriam, a Latin phrase that means “for the greater glory of God.” This would be the standard for all their missions.

Ironically, as his young Jesuits embarked on various apostolic adventures around the world, the fifty-year-old Ignatius stayed put. Until his death in 1556, he managed the Society from his desk in Rome, sending others to labor all over the world while penning thousands of letters of instruction and encouragement. As superior general, Ignatius had great love for his fellow Jesuits, but he did not hesitate to challenge them. During these years in Rome, he also wrote the constitutions of his fledgling order, fine-tuned the *Spiritual Exercises*, and continued to give the retreat to people from all walks of life.

Ignatius died on July 31, 1556, after suffering the effects of a persistent stomach ailment. At his death, the Society numbered nearly one thousand men, with houses and colleges stretching from Brazil to across Europe and Japan. Ignatius was canonized, together with Francis Xavier, in 1622.



Over the years, the young knight’s desire for power, prestige, and privilege had been transformed—by God’s grace—into a desire for a life of prayer, service, and simplicity. Gradually, Ignatius grew in his awareness of God’s deep love not just for the world generally but for himself personally. He experienced this love as a profoundly intimate call by Christ to follow him, a call that filled Ignatius with a passionate zeal to serve God and to help souls.

For Ignatius and the Society of Jesus, the primary instrument to discern God’s call in our lives is the *Spiritual Exercises*. Through the Exercises, we grow in faith, hope, and love. In them, we prepare for and sustain ourselves in the service of God and others. More than a book, the Exercises are an experience, a great adventure to the heart of God and, therefore, to the real and present needs of the world.

The Ignatian Adventure

AS WE'VE SEEN, IGNATIUS OF Loyola as a young man left his family home in Spain to embark on an adventure that would transform countless lives, beginning with his own. Traveling across Europe and the Mediterranean, he would learn that the greatest adventures in life were not always geographic. The adventure that God had in store for Ignatius was about traveling the distance between the head and the heart and about inspiring in Ignatius bold, holy desires for God's greater glory and the service of others.

Ignatius gave the church the Spiritual Exercises as a testament to God's gentle, persistent laboring in his life. Over his lifetime, Ignatius became convinced that the Exercises could help other people draw closer to God and discern God's call in their lives, much as they had helped him.

The Exercises have never been for Jesuits alone. Ignatius crafted the Exercises as a layman, and he intended them to benefit the entire church. He honed them as he offered the Exercises to a variety of people. Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, the Society of Jesus has continued to offer the Exercises in varied and creative ways to ever-increasing numbers of people.

By making the Spiritual Exercises available and leading people through them, Jesuits share their heritage with the world, including with their students and colleagues in ministry. This is especially important as laypersons assume more active roles in Jesuit universities, schools, parishes, and other works. This book offers one way that the Exercises may be offered to individuals

and groups. Before exploring the different ways that this book can be used, let's look more carefully at the time-tested genius of the Exercises.

Spiritual Exercises

People interested in the Exercises may be familiar with other spiritual classics, such as those by John of the Cross, Teresa of Ávila, Thomas Merton, or Dorothy Day. Such books can be read privately and prayerfully. Their style may be mystical, poetic, or descriptive. The books have the form of narrative or exhortation. The *Spiritual Exercises* is nothing like those works. Ignatius's *Exercises* makes for very dry reading—it's more like reading a cookbook or how-to guide. The retreatant need not even read the book of the *Exercises* because Ignatius intended the book as a manual for spiritual directors or guides to lead others through the Exercises (*SE* 2). In one sense, there is nothing new in the Exercises: Ignatius relied on prayer forms and spiritual traditions deeply rooted in the church. What is distinctive is how Ignatius artfully weaves them together and how much he emphasizes the experiential and practical in the life of prayer.

Thus, the **purpose of the Exercises** is very practical: to grow in union with God, who frees us to make good decisions about our lives and to "help souls." Ignatius invites us into an intimate encounter with God, revealed in Jesus Christ, so that we can learn to think and act more like Christ. The Exercises help us grow in interior freedom from sin and disordered loves so that we can respond more generously to God's call in our life (*SE* 2, 21). The Exercises demand much of us, engaging our intellect and emotions, our memory and will. Making the Exercises can be both exhilarating and exhausting; it's no wonder that Ignatius compared making the Spiritual Exercises to doing physical exercise, such as "taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running" (*SE* 1).

The Exercises are a school of prayer. The two primary forms of praying taught in the Exercises are meditation and contemplation.

In **meditation**, we use our intellect to wrestle with basic principles that guide our life. Reading Scripture, we pray over words, images, and ideas. We engage our memory to appreciate the activity of God in our life. Such insights into who God is and who we are before God allow our hearts to be moved.

Contemplation is more about feeling than thinking. Contemplation often stirs the emotions and inspires deep, God-given desires. In contemplation, we rely on our imaginations to place ourselves in a setting from the Gospels or in a scene proposed by Ignatius. Scripture has a central place in the Exercises because it is the revelation of who God is, particularly in Jesus Christ, and of what God does in our world. *In the Exercises, we pray with Scripture; we do not study it.* Although Scripture study is central to any believer's faith, we leave for another time extended biblical exegesis and theological investigation.

The Movements of the Exercises

The Exercises have a natural rhythm. Ignatius divides the Exercises into four "weeks" (*SE* 4). These weeks are not calendar weeks but phases or movements felt within a person who is praying through the Exercises:

- **Preparation Days:** Just as marathon runners do not begin a race with a sprint, we start the Exercises slowly and gently. We till the soil a bit before doing any planting. In the first days of the full Exercises, we consider the gift of God's ongoing creation in the world and in us. We pray for a spirit of awe and gratitude for the gifts of God in our lives. We hope to experience a deeply felt sense of God's unconditional love for us.
- **First Week:** Having recognized God's boundless generosity to us, we naturally face our own limited response. We let God reveal to us our sinfulness and need for conversion. We acknowledge how we have misused God's gift of freedom.

With God's help, we recognize and understand the patterns of sin in our lives. We do so in the context of knowing deep down how much God loves us and wants to free us from everything that gets in the way of loving God, others, and ourselves—that is, from everything that makes us unhappy. We pray for the grace of embracing ourselves as loved sinners. We keep our gaze fixed always on God's mercy.

- **Second Week:** Having experienced God's faithful love, we are moved to respond with greater generosity. We want to love and serve God and others more. As we pray through the life of Jesus Christ presented in the Gospels, we ask to know him more intimately so that we can love him more dearly and follow him more closely. We come to appreciate Jesus' values and his vision of the world. This heartfelt knowing that leads to concrete action is a defining grace of the Exercises.
- **Third Week:** Our deepening personal identification with Jesus inspires us to want to be with him in his suffering and death. We spend time contemplating the Lord's passion, which is the consummate expression of God's faithfulness and love for us.
- **Fourth Week:** Just as we accompany Jesus in the Passion, we walk with the Risen Lord in the joy of the resurrected life. We continue to learn from him as he consoles others. Having savored God's love for us and our world, we pray with a generous heart to find God in all things, to love and serve God and others in concrete ways and with great enthusiasm.

A caution: neatly laying out the retreat in this way can be misleading, as though we were in control. To the contrary, we follow the lead of the Spirit, as Ignatius did, and the Spirit may lead us through some twists and turns along the way. We should not follow the book of the Exercises in a mechanical way because God

works with each of us so uniquely. A trusted mentor or spiritual guide can help us navigate these movements of the soul.

Discernment

The **discernment of spirits** underlies the expanse of the Exercises. The one who discerns is like the adventurers who test the winds or check a compass to make sure they're heading in the right direction. In discernment of spirits, we notice the interior movements of our hearts, which include our thoughts, feelings, desires, attractions, and resistances. We determine where they are coming from and where they are leading us; and then we propose to act in a way that leads to greater faith, hope, and love. A regular practice of discernment helps us make good decisions.

In the course of the Exercises, some people make important life decisions. The decision may concern a significant relationship, a career or religious vocation, or a change in lifestyle or habits of living. The Exercises provide many helps in making such decisions. The key is being open to the Spirit, who will present us with these decisions and guide us in making them. For others, the Exercises are not about making a big decision about what to do but about how to be. In other words, they teach us how to live, think, pray, love, and relate in the context of commitments we've already made.



As with any genuine adventure, we cannot know at the outset where we will end up. But we can be assured that God, who is always faithful, will be with us and will lead us where we need to go. Though uncertain of where our journey will end, we know where it begins: here and now. God chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ, living in the beauty and brokenness of our world. It is in *this* place and *this* time, in the details of our individual lives, where we meet God.

By even exploring an invitation to make the Exercises in some form, you have taken the first step on the journey and revealed a generous spirit. Ignatius commends such magnanimity at the opening of the Exercises:

The persons who make the Exercises will benefit greatly by entering upon them with great spirit and generosity toward their Creator and Lord, and by offering all their desires and freedom to him so that His Divine Majesty can make use of their persons and of all they possess in whatsoever way is in accord with his most holy will. (*SE* 5)

Such courage, openness, and generosity are attributes of adventurers following in the footsteps of Ignatius. He has blazed for us a fascinating trail, which runs from his life to Christ's life through our very own. To better understand where our particular trail begins, we now explore the different ways we may experience the Exercises and make use of this particular guidebook.

Different Paths, Same Journey

THE BOOK OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES* opens with twenty preliminary notes, or annotations. A theme runs through these notes: **adaptability**. Ignatius's own conversion taught him that God works with each person uniquely, so he insisted that the Exercises be adapted to meet the particular needs of the one making them. The goal is drawing closer to God, not mechanically running through all of the exercises in order or in unison with others. In other words, the end of the Exercises is a Person, not a performance.

Ways of Making the Exercises

Some people have the opportunity to make the Exercises over thirty or more consecutive days, usually removed from regular life in a retreat house setting. This retreat is described in the **twentieth annotation**. (Jesuits make this “long retreat” at least twice in their lives.) Ignatius realized that many people do not have the luxury of time or resources to make a thirty-day retreat. Thus, in the **nineteenth annotation**, he describes how a person may be directed through the entirety of the Exercises but over an extended period of time, while continuing his or her ordinary daily affairs. Others, because of age, experience, life circumstance, or time constraints, cannot cover the full breadth of the Exercises. Instead, they pray through particular parts of the Exercises, such

as during a weekend or weeklong retreat or a day of prayer. This is an **eighteenth-annotation** retreat.

The preliminary notes reveal Ignatius's intention to offer the Exercises to many people, but in different ways. We should resist judging one way of making the Exercises against another, as if one way were superior. Instead, the adaptability of the Exercises poses the question, Which way is most suitable to the person desiring to make the Exercises?

How This Book Can Be Used

Even within each format for making the Exercises there is ample room for adaptation. This book offers such flexibility and can be used by those who are creatively adapting the Exercises to meet the needs of people today. However it is used, this book, like the text of the Spiritual Exercises itself, is to be experienced, not read. It's a handy guide that invites pray-ers to encounter the living God, who is active in their lives and the larger world.

First, the book may be used in its entirety to facilitate an eight-month-long retreat in daily life. In the pages that follow, there are thirty-two weeks of prayer, with suggestions for every day. For a nineteenth-annotation retreat like this, the more traditional practice is for the retreatant to pray daily on his or her own and then meet one-on-one with a spiritual director every week or so. The spiritual director, who serves as a guide for the journey, is central to the Exercises offered in this format. The director listens to the experience of retreatants and helps them discern the movement of God in their prayer and in daily events. The director may adapt the outline of the retreat presented in this book to the particular circumstances of a retreatant.

As important as the role of the director is, Ignatius reminds us in the introductory notes to the Exercises that the chief spiritual director is God, who communicates with each person. The director should make every effort not to get in the way:

It is more appropriate and far better that the Creator and Lord himself should communicate himself to the devout soul, embracing it in love and praise, and disposing it for the way which will enable the soul to serve him better in the future. Accordingly, the one giving the Exercises ought not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer on a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord. (*SE* 15)

In recent years, Jesuit universities, high schools, and parishes have experimented with this traditional model because there was a great demand for the Exercises but not enough directors to meet with each retreatant individually. One adaptation that has proved successful is to offer the Exercises to groups of pray-ers. Instead of meeting one-on-one with a director, retreatants meet in a small group facilitated by a director. Even if a person makes the Exercises individually with a director, he or she may enjoy getting together with others who are making the Exercises. Some Jesuit institutions offer monthly gatherings for those on retreat in daily life to share the graces of the retreat and to listen to presentations about the Exercises. Such gatherings help to build community and to bolster the Ignatian identity of a university, school, or parish.

Second, the book may be used to help structure shorter experiences of prayer. A person or group might pray the Exercises in discrete blocks. The book is divided into five segments based on Ignatius's "weeks," which may be helpful in arranging such prayer experiences. One creative approach may be to adapt the prayer materials to the liturgical season—for example, praying with the Third Week material during Lent or with the Fourth Week material during the Easter season.

Third, for those who have made the Exercises before, the book may serve as a helpful way to deepen some of those graces. Such

an experienced pray-er may skip around to different parts of the book to revisit the Exercises, all depending on where God is leading him or her.

Finally, for someone who is looking for structure in personal prayer life, the book may be a helpful companion because it offers suggestions for prayer around various themes. Such pray-ers shouldn't try to make the Exercises from start to finish on their own, without the help of an experienced guide. But certainly they can use the book to dip their toes in the water, to become familiar with the rhythm and techniques of Ignatian prayer. The rules for discernment of spirits scattered throughout the book may also be helpful for people seeking to ground decisions and values in their faith.



Although the Exercises are a valuable gift to God's people, they are not for everyone. Ignatius would be the first to insist that the Exercises are only a means to an end. There are other ways of praying that help us grow in intimacy with God and that inspire a life of service to others. But if a person is called to experience the Spiritual Exercises in some form, he or she is in for an exciting, unpredictable, challenging, and perhaps life-changing adventure.

Preparing for the Adventure

BEFORE BEGINNING THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, you must carefully discern whether you're ready for the adventure and in what way you will travel. The Exercises in the format of the nineteenth annotation (the full Exercises) require a significant commitment of time and energy. They presuppose that retreatants are already in a habit of praying and are comfortable talking about their interior life and their faith with a spiritual director or group. *No one should feel any less about themselves simply because they choose not to begin or continue with the Exercises in this form.*

Some may choose instead to experience Ignatian prayer in a shorter format or to commit themselves to praying more regularly but without excessive structure, using some of the techniques in this book.

For those beginning to pray with the Exercises in some form, Ignatius offers some helpful advice to prepare for the adventure. We are wise to follow his counsel. His suggestions will help you develop a rhythm and pace of prayer, which you can adjust and personalize as you progress in whatever retreat form you've chosen.

First, commit to spending **thirty to forty-five minutes per day** in private, personal prayer. You need an extended period of time to engage the prayer material deeply and savor the graces offered. If you are not in the habit of praying that long in one sitting, then slowly build up to that time in the weeks leading up to the retreat. To help you establish a habit of praying, try praying at the same time each day.

Find a regular **prayer space**: a quiet room in your home with a comfortable chair, a favorite church or chapel, even a secluded

place outside. It is often helpful to keep the same prayer space throughout the retreat: such regularity helps you ease into prayer. To remind you that this space is sacred, mark it with a candle, icon, painting, photograph, rosary, or crucifix. If it's helpful and not distracting, light incense or play soft, meditative music.

This book suggests material to pray over: Scripture passages, Ignatius's meditations and contemplations, or other exercises. Look over these materials before you formally begin your prayer period—either the evening or morning before (*SE* 73–74). This preparation allows you to sort through any questions or confusion about the prayer material itself, thus removing unnecessary mental clutter from your prayer period. You can dive right in when you go to your prayer space.

In the time immediately before your prayer period, avoid sensory or information overload. Turn off the television, radio, and iPod; don't check e-mail or browse the Internet; turn off your cell phone. This discipline will make transitioning into the quiet of prayer easier.

Because you are praying the Exercises in the midst of your daily life, it is important to tell others with whom you live about the retreat. You will likely need the support of family and close friends during the retreat. They can help you very practically by giving you the time and space to pray each day.

In addition to structuring your day and your environment, you will benefit by ordering, at least at first, your time of prayer (or “prayer period”):

Compose Yourself

Ignatius writes:

A step or two away from the place where I will make my contemplation or meditation, I will stand for the length of an Our Father. I will raise my mind and think how God our Lord is looking

at me, and other such thoughts. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility. (*SE* 75)

- Imagine how God looks upon you: with great joy and gratitude for your offering of time. Imagine God's long, loving gaze upon you.
- Once you are in your prayer space, still yourself. Although it is sometimes hard to settle your mind, you can relax your body by breathing deeply and slowly. With each breath, you may utter a short mantra, such as "God be with me," "My Lord and my God," "Come, Holy Spirit," or something similar.
- In prayer, the body and spirit work together. Find a posture conducive to prayer: sit, kneel, stand, or recline in a relaxed position (*SE* 76). Finding a comfortable posture will keep you from changing it as you pray, which can be distracting. Also, beware that you are not so relaxed that you fall asleep!
- Ask God to be with you in this time of prayer. In words that flow naturally, make a simple offering of your time, attention, and energies. For example, Ignatius suggests one such preparatory prayer:

Ask God our Lord for the grace that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be ordered purely to the service and praise of the Divine Majesty. (*SE* 46)

- In making the offering, you remind yourself at the outset that you are not thinking about God but encountering God in a very real way.

Pray for the Grace

Recall from Ignatius's conversion story how God gently but steadily transformed his zeal and passion from serving the king

and winning the love of a lady to serving the church for the greater glory of God. Ignatian spirituality taps into our deepest desires. In them we can discern God's noble desires for us.

Thus, at the beginning of each prayer period, Ignatius advises that we pray for a certain grace, or gift from God: "ask God our Lord for what I want and desire" (*SE* 48). Simply naming what we deeply desire opens us to receive the gift God wants to give us. Moreover, praying for a grace helps us to notice when we actually receive that gift later on. In this way, we realize that the grace is not of our own making but is the result of God's generosity to us. Finally, praying out of our desires grounds us in the present, keeping our prayer "real."

Throughout the retreat, Ignatius suggests specific graces to pray for. Always feel free to articulate a different grace or to use different words if the Spirit is moving you in that direction. Imagine God asking you, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Some graces are hard to ask for. For example, in all honesty, you may resist asking to let go of a preoccupation or way of thinking or acting that is comfortable for you. Or you may hesitate in asking to be placed with Christ, carrying the cross. Such resistance is understandable. If you find yourself resisting a suggested grace, then pray not for the grace itself but for a desire to want the grace. For example, "Lord, I'm really having a hard time asking to walk with you by living a more simple life; for now, give me the desire to want to do that."

Although grace is revealed in the particular gifts God gives you, grace above all is God's presence in your life. The Giver is the gift!

Do the Prayer

Having taken some time to compose yourself and center your mind and heart, engage the material presented in the book or suggested by your spiritual director. This book provides exercises for every day of the calendar week, but do not feel that you need to go through the days mechanically. The goal is God, not the book! Don't worry about missing something if you skip around. God will give you what you need.

Ignatius leaves room to adapt the Exercises to meet you where you are, emotionally and spiritually, during the retreat. This **flexibility** is especially important during a retreat in everyday life, when some person, problem, or experience may become the focus of your prayer or when you spend several prayer periods lingering over one meditation or contemplation.

Close Your Prayer

Just as you begin your prayer time with certain rituals or prayers, you should formally bring your prayer to a close. You can conclude with a favorite prayer, such as the Our Father or Hail Mary, or with another prayer of your choosing. You might spontaneously pray to God the Father, to Jesus, or to Mary in a very conversational manner. Use your body to mark the closing of prayer: such as with a bow, by making the sign of the cross, or with an open gesture of the hands or arms (*SE* 75).

Review the Prayer

Ignatius advises that *after* we formally close our prayer, we reflect on our experience of prayer (*SE* 77). Keeping a journal is most helpful during a retreat. This exercise can be challenging because we are trying to put into words our encounter with God, who is Holy Mystery. Although it is challenging, trying to articulate such sublime experiences can help us discern how God is meeting us or leading us in our prayer. As a practical matter, journaling helps us prepare for meetings with a spiritual director or retreat group. The journal is for your eyes only. When the retreat concludes, the journal becomes a rich spiritual treasure to which you can return months or even years after the retreat.

The purpose of journaling is not to replay your time of prayer minute by minute. Instead, after your prayer period concludes, consider the following:

- What were the significant interior movements (that is, feelings, reactions, intuitions, desires, emotions, thoughts, or insights)?
- What was the prevailing mood of my prayer: peace, agitation, excitement, boredom, confusion, calm?
- Was my prayer more about the head or the heart, or about both?
- What word, phrase, image, or memory meant most to me during prayer?
- Is there some unfinished business that I think God is calling me to return to during another time of prayer?
- Is there something happening in my life that is becoming part of my prayer? Do I feel moved to do something concrete in my life?
- Am I making the necessary preparations for my prayer? Is there anything I am doing or not doing that is getting in the way of my listening to God?

The review of prayer is not homework; do not feel bound to answer each of these questions every time you journal. Instead, consider journaling as another way of praying, of going deeper to sift through the graces. Write in a style that is comfortable for you. In your journaling, feel free to write directly to God the Father or to Jesus, as if you were writing a letter or an e-mail.



These guidelines reflect the wisdom of St. Ignatius and retreat directors who are committed to Ignatian ways of praying. However helpful they may be, the guidelines are not a magic formula that will automatically summon certain graces. We cannot control the movement of God in our lives, but we can take concrete steps to make ourselves more open and receptive to how God speaks to us.

A Note to Spiritual Directors and Retreat Leaders

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, I outline thirty-two weeks of a nineteenth-annotation retreat, with prayer material for each of the seven days in a week. Keeping in mind Ignatius's insistence on adaptability, adjust the retreat to meet the needs of your retreatants or to accommodate the schedule at your university, school, or parish. The book can be taken in parts, adapting the retreat into shorter periods based on a theme or liturgical season. The prayer material is ample, which allows you to extend or condense days or weeks as you see fit.

With this book in hand, some retreatants may put pressure on themselves to "get through" the book. Or if you stay with some prayer material longer than others, they may think that they are doing something wrong or not keeping up with others. Point out these reactions for what they are: needless pressures and distractions.

Some retreatants, particularly those prone to perfectionism, may worry that they will miss something if they do not follow all the days as planned. Assure them that with God as our ultimate spiritual director, it is unlikely that we'll miss something important! You can also offer the following image if it's helpful: praying through the Exercises is more like moving along a spiral than making a linear progression; we keep returning to key graces, considering them in different ways, deepening them as we go along.

We gaze upon Jesus from different vantage points, getting to know him more and more intimately.

After the sixth week of prayer material, I suggest discerning with retreatants whether to continue with the Exercises. Such discernment is critical before moving to considerations of sin and God's mercy in Ignatius's **First Week**. Some may find that the preparatory material has been enough to jump-start their prayer life. Others may struggle in finding the time and energy to pray formally through the Exercises. Remember, the Exercises are not an end in themselves—they are only one means of building a more intimate relationship with God and putting faith into action. It is not a failure to end a retreat after careful discernment. The retreatant simply learns to shift gears and pray in a different way.

I offer my own version of the Examen at the end of the preparatory weeks, but you may decide to introduce this prayer at another time. Honoring the priority that Ignatius placed on the Examen as a way of praying, we should encourage retreatants to integrate the Examen into their daily practice of prayer early in the retreat.

As spiritual guides, we walk with retreatants through the Exercises. We pray that our faithfulness and attentiveness to them mirrors God's surpassing care. Although we keep our focus on the retreatants' experience of God, we realize that the adventure is not for them alone. In the Exercises, directors, too, meet the living God. We thus begin the adventure with great gratitude, humility, and expectation.

Embark on the spiritual ADVENTURE of a lifetime.

THERE'S NO BETTER GUIDE THAN ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA if one desires to discover how faith and everyday life can thrive together. In *The Ignatian Adventure*, Kevin O'Brien, SJ, follows St. Ignatius's lead and offers today's time-strapped individual a unique way of "making" the Spiritual Exercises in daily life.

While the book opens with helpful background information, including a brief history of St. Ignatius, its core provides 32 weeks of prayer and meditations to draw participants into a deeper encounter with God. But what truly sets this book apart from other Ignatian retreats in daily life (19th annotation) is how O'Brien weaves throughout the pages his own personal accounts of living out the Exercises in everyday life. His moving stories make it easy to see how the Exercises intersect with the real world.

The Ignatian Adventure is an ideal resource for spiritual directors, but its user-friendly, down-to-earth style also makes it the perfect book for any individual seeking a better understanding of Ignatian spirituality or a deeper life of prayer.



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