

SPIRITUALITY

O God,
you have
searched me
and known me.
You know when I sit
and when I stand.
Where can I go
from your spirit?

If I take the
wings of morning
and settle at the
farthest reaches
of the sea,
even there
your hand
will lead me,
and your right
hand hold me
fast.

You knit me
together in my
mother's womb.
I praise you that
I am so
awesomely
and wonderfully
made.
Psalm 139



God Saves and Blesses Us

In our holy history God acts to save and bless people.

God saves Noah from the great flood.

God hears the Hebrew slaves crying out in Egypt to be free and helps them escape on a dry path through the sea. God gathers the defeated and exiled Israelites, scattered like dry bones in a field, and leads them home through the wilderness to be a people again.



Jesus' name means *he saves*. In his ministry Jesus heals the sick and frees people from evil influences. He makes people whole to show God's love for them. He gives himself totally in love for us, even to dying on the cross. Jesus' resurrection shows us his love is stronger than evil or death.



God fills the world with grandeur and blesses humankind with the capacity for awe and praise. In Psalm 8 a poet reflects:

**When I look at the heavens, O God,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars
that you have established;
what are human beings
that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
O God, how excellent is your name
in all the earth.**

The book of Proverbs in the bible describes God as Wisdom, who is with God from the beginning and makes a home in the world. All creation is Wisdom's table where we can eat our fill and drink wine without cost. Like Wisdom Jesus blesses us with abundant life. Jesus is the living bread that comes down from heaven. He is the choice wine at a wedding feast for all people.

We human beings are awesomely made. We can recognize when God saves and blesses us. The Spirit of God is with us not just when we are good but in every joy, sorrow, doubt, conflict, success, failure, and friendship. Spirituality is the name for exploring our experience of God. Psalm 139 tells us that no matter where we go, God is already there. Like air, the Spirit of God invisibly surrounds us. We live, move, and have our being in the unseen, life-giving embrace of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit is the name we give to the here-and-now presence of God in us and in all that is. Spirituality is learning how the Spirit stirs in us—in our prayers, in our hopes, in our fears, in the peaks and pits of our lives.

♦ **When have you experienced God's presence with you? What is a way God blesses you?**

We Recognize the Spirit...

IN NATURE

Read the stories on this page and reflect on your own spiritual experiences.

All creation and each of us are from God and in God. To recognize the Spirit of God with us, we have to learn to name the activity of the Spirit just as we learn to name actions when we learn a language. We can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch God in our world, in our experience of being alive, and in our relationships with other beings.

This Ellery cost me twenty-five cents. He is a deep red-orange, darker than most goldfish. He steers short distances mainly with his slender red lateral fins they seem to provide impetus for going backward, up, or down. It took me a few days to discover his ventral fins; they are completely transparent and all but invisible—dream fins. He also has a short anal fin, and a tail that is deeply notched and perfectly transparent at the two tapered tips. He can extend his mouth, so it looks like a length of pipe; he can shift the angle of his eyes in his head so he can look before and behind himself, instead of simply out to his side.

His belly, what there is of it, is white ventrally, and a patch of this white extends up his sides—the variegated Ellery. When he opens his gill slits he shows a thin crescent of silver where the flap overlapped—as though all his brightness were sunburn.

For this creature, as I said, I paid twenty-five cents. I had never bought an animal before. It was very simple; I went to a store in Roanoke called “Wet Pets”; I handed the man a quarter, and he handed me a knotted plastic bag bouncing with water in which a green plant floated and the goldfish swam.

This fish, two bits worth, has a coiled gut, a spine radiating fine bones, and a brain. Just before I sprinkle his food flakes into his bowl, I rap three times on the bowl’s edge; now he is conditioned, and swims to the surface when I rap. And, he has a heart.

Annie Dillard
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

I saw a monarch butterfly flutter upward in the mist of the water racing over Niagara Falls. It

flew as carefree as if it were in some peaceful field instead of so near a powerful falls that has killed almost everyone who has gone over it. I found myself cheering for the butterfly and feeling amazed at the lifting power in its fragile wings.

Aisha



♦ What is awesome about the Ellery?

♦ What amazes you in nature or disgusts you because it is being ruined or polluted?



IN BEING ALIVE

I am running. The wind blows coolly on my face as my legs move in easy rhythm. Inside me everything begins disappearing. I leave my thoughts and worries behind. I could go on forever without any effort.

Stacy



istock Bill Grove

If I need to feel God's presence and I need to be alone, I ride my bike down to a forest at the end of my street. Sometimes I will climb a tree and sit there. I clear my mind for a minute or two. After that I think about God and God's mysterious ways. I have found out that this strategy lets me think of amazing things; ideas just seem to pop into my head.

Sometimes I'll spend two hours down there, and it only seems like a few minutes. This is when I feel closest to God—when it's just me and mother nature.



Now you might think either that I'm weird or I'm deeply religious, but I kid you not. In that small patch of trees I call a forest, whenever I see an insect, a bird, a squirrel, the wind blowing through the trees, or when there is just silence and everything is still, I realize that God truly had a plan for me when God set out for six days to create this wonderful place some people call earth but I call home.

David Kelly

♦ **What experience of yourself being alive or of recognizing God loves you have you experienced? Describe the experience.** _____

Where Am I Going?

My spiritual experience

What was my life like before?

What was my life like after?

Reflect on a spiritual experience you have had in your life. Think of an experience that you often remember and reflect on, or an experience that you know changed you—a move, a divorce, a death, a challenge.

What did I lose?

Do I like the direction in I'm going?
Is my direction the way of a Christian?

What did I gain?

IN RELATIONSHIPS

We experience the Spirit not only in creation and in ourselves but in relationships. Friends pull us out of ourselves to worry about how they are. Friends help us laugh at ourselves when we are too sure or too unsure. When friends listen to our dumb fears, the fears often go away.



In all these experiences the Spirit is there closer to us than we are to ourselves. The Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son in the life of the Trinity.

The Spirit is present in our relationships drawing us into the love and union that is the inner life of God.

Nothing in our lives is apart from the Spirit. The Spirit is in us, deeper than despair and higher than our best dreams. In yearning for more, the Spirit is there. In delighting in friendship, the Spirit is there.

◆ **What relationships have opened you to know and care about someone else?**

When Craig Kielberger read about Iqbal Masih's murder in the newspaper, he couldn't help putting himself in the other boy's place.

"Because Iqbal was 12, and I was 12, I couldn't help comparing our two lives. I looked at everything he had to fight for and overcome and eventually how he was murdered. Then I looked at my life and how everything was given to me on a silver platter. I'm not rich, but I'm not poor."

Iqbal's parents bonded their son to a carpet maker in his village when he was four. He became one of 500,000 bonded children in Pakistan who work 14-hour days and 6-days weeks, shackled to looms where they tie the knots that make carpets. At age 10, Iqbal went to a meeting of the Bonded Labor Liberation Front (BLLF) and learned his bondage was illegal. He got a certificate of freedom, began attending the BLLF school, and in the next two years helped free 3,000 children from slavery by telling his story.



Iqbal Masih

When the International Labor Organization (ILO) brought him to the U.S. and Reebok gave him its Human Rights Youth in Action Award, consumers heard his story and bought fewer carpets. Four

months later Iqbal was gunned down while riding his bike in a quiet rural village in Pakistan, where he was visiting relatives. He was 12.



Craig Kielberger

Craig traveled to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Nepal to see child labor conditions first hand. When he got home, he engaged eight classmates in writing letters, raising money, and taking action to end child labor. They became the first chapter of Free the Children, a network of young people working to end child labor.



As Craig travels and speaks, he works with and encourages other teens who have Free the Children chapters in their schools or parishes.