

SPIRITUALITY

The Spirit Stirs in Us

Psalm 139 tells us there is nowhere we can go that God is not. We can run neither to the ends of the earth nor deep within ourselves. The whole of creation and each of us ourselves are from God and in God.

The God of our Christian faith is not an old man who worked hard for six days long ago and far away and retired to a condo in sun country. We understand God is three persons in one divine nature. The three persons are always in relationship—the Father begetting the Son, the Son wholly reflecting the Father, the Spirit the living love between them. The Spirit is the name we give to the here and now presence of God in all that lives in us and in our world.

We are awesomely made so that we are able to be in touch with God and can respond to God's Spirit. We can find the Spirit present in every event of our lives—every joy, sorrow, doubt, conflict, success, friendship.

The world we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch reveals God's creative, life-giving love. Seeing the enormous size of redwoods moves us to awe. A grandparent takes our arm and we feel closeness. A friend sings a song from his



heart about his father's death. These are experiences of Spirit.

People we love die or move away and we miss them terribly because they have touched us—held our hands, kissed us good-bye every morning, hugged hello and congratulations. Yearning to be together again is an experience of Spirit. We know the Spirit in the questions our minds can't put to rest—Why evil? Why good? Why bother?

Like air, Spirit invisibly surrounds us and gives us life within. We live, move, and have our being in the unseen, life-giving embrace of the Spirit of God. We experience the Spirit of God in our being alive and in the gift of others being alive.

Yet, we numb our feelings, and pay little attention to our joy, disgust, yearning, or any other feelings and experiences. Spirituality is learning that the Spirit stirs in each of us—in our prayers, in our hopes, in our fears, in the peaks and pits of our lives.

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

● When have you experienced God's presence with you?



Where Do I Recognize the SPIRIT?



Ask the beasts
and they will teach you;
the birds of the air,
and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the
earth
and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea
will declare to you.
Who among these
does not know
that the hand of God
has done this?
In God's hand is the life
of every living thing,
and the breath of
every living being.

Job 12.7-10

The poems and stories on these pages describe experiences of the presence of God's Spirit in all that is and especially in our human spirits. Read them. These experiences invite you to recognize your own experiences of God's Spirit.

In Nature The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

MARY OLIVER, *House of Light* *



istockphoto: Jill Lang

● What experiences of awe or oneness with nature have you had—a natural high or peak feeling? What experiences of the ruin of nature—a feeling of anger or disgust?

In Myself

I waited for the stage door to open and devour me as it had all the other musicians ahead of me at the state music competition. But when the door opened, I walked on stage, took a deep breath, blew a mellow low C

that rumbled out of my sax and filled the room with the slow, lazy roll of "Ole Man River." My fingers chased the melody up the scale, climbed down to the seesawing rhythm of lifting cotton, and slid an octave down as the laborer gets drunk and goes to jail. I pulled in air and swelled the melody, winding onward like the river rolling, climbing one octave, two, and beyond to the highest notes my horn could make. No squeaks. I got a first from the judge but even better, the music came not just from my horn but from inside me.

Michael



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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.

The food I ate is gone. I feel light. Blood is running in the body the way it should. I could go on forever without any effort.

BOB

● When have you experienced yourself alive, powerful, or part of a whole?

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In Relationships

We experience the Spirit not only in creation and in ourselves but in relationships.

Friends pull us out of ourselves when we worry about how they are. Friends help us laugh at ourselves when we are too sure or too unsure. When friends listen to our foolish fears, the fears often go away.

When we miss a friend who moves, we experience the Spirit in our desire for friendships that last.

When a parent accepts us or a friend sticks by us, the Spirit touches us in the power of friendship and acceptance.

When we meet a person who tells us we don't need to show off, we experience the Spirit in a call to be ourselves.

When we feel alone or alienated from someone who once shared our feelings, we experience emptiness but also perhaps openness to more in our lives.

In all these experiences the Spirit is as close to us or closer than we are to ourselves. The Spirit is present in our relationships, drawing us into the love and union that is the inner life in 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. The Spirit knows who we are even when we don't.

● In what experiences of relationships have you found the Spirit?

“Out of My Life”

Sarah and I went to grade and high school together. In high school Sarah found her niche with a group that she met by working in the fall play. Eventually I grew sick of the typical adolescent male lunchroom behavior and found my way to Sarah's new group.

Sophomore year we sang in the choir and music ministry and worked on the school musical together. We talked about the latest movies, books, and who I was going to ask to the Homecoming Dance. I talked in confidence to her about problems at home and school.

That summer we both got jobs. Then came the dreadful news. Sarah had a boyfriend. We drifted apart. She had dated other boyfriends before. When this relationship lasted, I got used to life without her and became great friends

with Sarah's friends until Sarah asked me to help her get back in the social loop. I welcomed her renewed friendship but what she really wanted were the friendships I had strengthened during the time she let them deteriorate.

I didn't want to give up on a friendship that existed before I could spell my name, but when she wanted me to help her boyfriend make new friends, I got annoyed. We argued on the phone. I hung up on her, then called back. She hung up on me, saying, “I want you out of my life.” I was broken.



Time had made us great friends, so I thought time would heal the wound, but months of not talking turned into years. I felt the ball was in her court. I hated her. I pitied her. I still loved her. Then on the first day of senior philosophy I found Sarah in my class. I felt uneasy. We exchanged glances. Maybe something would happen.

Tonight I answered an unexpected ring at my door. I let someone in who had hurt me. Accepting Sarah's apology and apologizing for myself seemed to dissolve all the anguish that I had clung to. Nothing in our friendship will be as great as before, but at least it will not be as bad as it was. Now because I've known betrayal, I know forgiving is liberating.

JEFF

● What moments of break-ups and painful separation have you had? What is their meaning for you?

In Relationships

Just showing up at Camp Mak-A-Dream in northwestern Montana takes a leap of faith.

The camp creates a community that welcomes and supports young cancer survivors and encourages them to do things beyond their comfort zones.

Zach, a young man from my cabin, was diagnosed with a brain tumor just after he got his full ride scholarship to play college football. He had surgery, chemo, radiation. He lost his scholarship, his fitness, his short-term memory, his sense of balance, his confident social manner, and one of the best years of his life. Because of side effects, he postponed college and had been house-bound for most of the year before he came to camp. He knew he needed to participate in life. He started by coming to camp.

At first camp overwhelmed him—the number of new faces with names he couldn't remember, the new landscape of the campus, which his memory could not absorb. He felt wobbly and tired. The first day he slept a lot in part because he was tired and in part to remain in the safety of a

cabin where he couldn't get lost. I brought him his meals.

On the second day, he came with me to lunch. All welcomed him and made sure their nametags were always visible. They introduced themselves again and again and accompanied him around the campus, giving him directions and letting him lean on them for balance.

Some campers had hiked to the top of the butte that morning and told Zach about the climb.

"I have got to get up there. I'd like it if you would help me," he told me.

I must admit, I wasn't sure he could make it. Walking across campus wore him out, but I agreed to help.

Zach looked me in the eyes. "We can do this," he said. "It will be challenging. I can't wait." He smiled.

Two days later, after some practice walking uphill over open ground, he was ready. We decided to get extra rest that night, get up early, grab some breakfast, and head for the top. Some of our cabin mates joined us.

Zach made it to the top. He never fell, but he leaned heavily on a

number of us. When we offered the option of turning back, he simply smiled and looked at the top. He accepted our offers of rest and drink and support. At the base of the last and most difficult section of the climb, he stopped, his arm around my shoulder, his breathing deep and hungry.

"I'll do this alone," he said.

We stood for some minutes until he started up the rise. I followed him, very slowly, all the

way to the top. He whooped and hollered and hugged and thanked every one of us in turn. He was intensely happy and absolutely alive. It took him a full day to recover physically, but he was a different man from then on—secure in the support of those around him, content with himself, confident, resurrected.

We were all blessed beyond our efforts. I learned later that Zach relapsed after camp and died two weeks later. There has been another ascension and another resurrection for Zach.

GREG NEIS

● What breakthrough moments in relationships have helped you recognize who you are?

